ROBERT BROWNING'S

POETICAL WORKS

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY

INCLUDING

A TRANSCRIPT FROM EURIPIDES

BEING THE

LAST ADVENTURE OF BALAUSTION

THE AGAMEMNON OF ÆSCHYLUS

BY

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LONDON
SMITH, ELDER, & CO., 15 WATERLOO PLACE
1889

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ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY;

INCLUDING

A TRANSCRIPT FROM EURIPIDES:

BEING THE

LAST ADVENTURE OF BALAUSTION.

οὐκ ἔσθω κενέβρει· ὁπόταν δὲ θύῃς τι, κάλει με.

I eat no carrion; when you sacrifice
Some cleanly creature—call me for a slice!

ARISTOPHANES' APOLOGY.

1875.

Wind, wave, and bark, bear Euthukles and me,
Balaustion, from—not sorrow but despair,
Not memory but the present and its pang!
Athenai, live thou hearted in my heart:
Never, while I live, may I see thee more,
Never again may these repugnant orbs
Ache themselves blind before the hideous pomp,
The ghastly mirth which mocked thine overthrow
—Death's entry, Haides' outrage!
Doomed to die,—
Fire should have flung a passion of embrace
About thee till, resplendently inarmed,
(Temple by temple folded to his breast,
All thy white wonder fainting out in ash)
Lightly some vaporous sigh of soul escaped,
And so the Immortals bade Athenai back!
Or earth might sunder and absorb thee, save,

Buried below Olumpos and its gods,
Akropolis to dominate her realm
For Koré, and console the ghosts; or, sea,
What if thy watery plural vastitude,
Rolling unanimous advance, had rushed,
Might upon might, a moment,—stood, one stare,
Sea-face to city-face, thy glaucous wave
Glassing that marbled last magnificence,—
Till fate's pale tremulous foam-flower tipped the grey,
And when wave broke and overswarmed and, sucked
To bounds back, multitudinously ceased,
Let land again breathe unconfused with sea,
Attiké was, Athenai was not now!

Such end I could have borne, for I had shared.
But this which, glanced at, aches within my orbs
To blinding,—bear me thence, bark, wind and wave!
Me, Euthukles, and, hearted in each heart,
Athenai, undisgraced as Pallas' self,
Bear to my birthplace, Helios' island-bride,
Zeus' darling: thither speed us, homeward-bound,
Wafted already twelve hours' sail away
From horror, nearer by one sunset Rhodes!

Why should despair be? Since, distinct above
Man's wickedness and folly, flies the wind

And floats the cloud, free transport for our soul
Out of its fleshly durance dim and low,—
Since disembodied soul anticipates
(Thought-borne as now, in rapturous unrestraint)
Above all crowding, crystal silentness,
Above all noise, a silver solitude:—
Surely, where thought so bears soul, soul in time
May permanently bide, "assert the wise,"
There live in peace, there work in hope once more—
O nothing doubt, Philemon! Greed and strife,
Hatred and cark and care, what place have they
In yon blue liberality of heaven?
How the sea helps! How rose-smit earth will rise
Breast-high thence, some bright morning, and be
Rhodes!
Heaven, earth and sea, my warrant—in their name,
Believe—o'er falsehood, truth is surely sphered,
O'er ugliness beams beauty, o'er this world
Extends that realm where, "as the wise assert,"
Philemon, thou shalt see Euripides
Clearer than mortal sense perceived the man!

A sunset nearer Rhodes, by twelve hours' sweep
Of surge secured from horror? Rather say,
Quieted out of weakness into strength.
I dare invite, survey the scene my sense

Staggered to apprehend: for, disenvolved
From the mere outside anguish and contempt,
Slowly a justice centred in a doom
Reveals itself. Ay, pride succumbed to pride,
Oppression met the oppressor and was matched.
Athenai's vaunt braved Sparté's violence
Till, in the shock, prone fell Peiraios, low
Rampart and bulwark lay, as,—timing stroke
Of hammer, axe, and beam hoist, poised and swung,—
The very flute-girls blew their laughing best,
In dance about the conqueror while he bade
Music and merriment help enginery
Batter down, break to pieces all the trust
Of citizens once, slaves now. See what walls
Play substitute for the long double range
Themistoklean, heralding a guest
From harbour on to citadel! Each side
Their senseless walls demolished stone by stone,
See,—outer wall as stonelike,—heads and hearts,—
Athenai's terror-stricken populace!
Prattlers, tongue-tied in crouching abjectness,—
Braggarts, who wring hands wont to flourish swords—
Sophist and rhetorician, demagogue,
(Argument dumb, authority a jest)
Dikast and heliast, pleader, litigant,
Quack-priest, sham-prophecy-retailer, scout

O' the customs, sycophant, whate'er the style,
Altar-scrap-snatcher, pimp and parasite,—
Rivalities at truce now each with each,
Stupefied mud-banks,—such an use they serve!
While the one order which performs exact
To promise, functions faithful last as first,
What is it but the city's lyric troop,
Chantress and psaltress, flute-girl, dancing-girl?
Athenai's harlotry takes laughing care
Their patron miss no pipings, late she loved,
But deathward tread at least the kordax-step.

Die then, who pulled such glory on your heads!
There let it grind to powder! Perikles!
The living are the dead now: death be life!
Why should the sunset yonder waste its wealth?
Prove thee Olympian! If my heart supply
Inviolate the structure,—true to type,
Build me some spirit-place no flesh shall find,
As Pheidias may inspire thee: slab on slab,
Renew Athenai, quarry out the cloud,
Convert to gold yon west extravagance!
'Neath Propulaia, from Akropolis
By vapoury grade and grade, gold all the way,
Step to thy snow-Pnux, mount thy Bema-cloud,
Thunder and lighten thence a Hellas through

That shall be better and more beautiful
And too august for Sparté's foot to spurn!
Chasmed in the crag, again our Theatre
Predominates, one purple: Staghunt-month,
Brings it not Dionusia? Hail, the Three!
Aischulos, Sophokles, Euripides
Compete, gain prize or lose prize, godlike still.
Nay, lest they lack the old god-exercise—
Their noble want the unworthy,—as of old,
(How otherwise should patience crown their might?)
What if each find his ape promoted man,
His censor raised for antic service still?
Some new Hermippos to pelt Perikles,
Kratinos to swear Pheidias robbed a shrine,
Eruxis—I suspect, Euripides,
No brow will ache because with mop and mow
He gibes my poet! There 's a dog-faced dwarf
That gets to godship somehow, yet retains
His apehood in the Egyptian hierarchy,
More decent, indecorous just enough:
Why should not dog-ape, graced in due degree,
Grow Momos as thou Zeus? Or didst thou sigh
Rightly with thy Makaria? "After life,
Better no sentiency than turbulence;
Death cures the low contention." Be it so!
Yet progress means contention, to my mind.

Euthukles, who, except for love that speaks,
Art silent by my side while words of mine
Provoke that foe from which escape is vain
Henceforward, wake Athenai's fate and fall,—
Memories asleep as, at the altar-foot
Those Furies in the Oresteian song,—
Do I amiss who, wanting strength, use craft,
Advance upon the foe I cannot fly,
Nor feign a snake is dormant though it gnaw?
That fate and fall, once bedded in our brain,
Roots itself past upwrenching; but coaxed forth,
Encouraged out to practise fork and fang,—
Perhaps, when satiate with prompt sustenance,
It may pine, likelier die than if left swell
In peace by our pretension to ignore,
Or pricked to threefold fury, should our stamp
Bruise and not brain the pest.

A middle course!
What hinders that we treat this tragic theme
As the Three taught when either woke some woe,
—How Klutaimnestra hated, what the pride
Of Iokasté, why Medcia clove
Nature asunder. Small rebuked by large,
We felt our puny hates refine to air,
Our poor prides sink, prevent the humbling hand,

Our petty passions purify their tide.
So, Euthukles, permit the tragedy
To re-enact itself, this voyage through,
Till sunsets end and sunrise brighten Rhodes!
Majestic on the stage of memory,
Peplosed and kothorned, let Athenai fall
Once more, nay, oft again till life conclude,
Lent for the lesson: Choros, I and thou!
What else in life seems piteous any more
After such pity, or proves terrible
Beside such terror?

Still—since Phrunichos
Offended, by too premature a touch
Of that Milesian smart-place freshly frayed—
(Ah, my poor people, whose prompt remedy
Was—fine the poet, not reform thyself!)
Beware precipitate approach! Rehearse
Rather the prologue, well a year away,
Than the main misery, a sunset old.
What else but fitting prologue to the piece
Style an adventure, stranger than my first
By so much as the issue it enwombed
Lurked big beyond Balaustion's littleness?
Second supreme adventure! O that Spring,
That eve I told the earlier to my friends!

Where are the four now, with each red-ripe mouth
Crumpled so close, no quickest breath it fetched
Could disengage the lip-flower furled to bud
For fear Admetos,—shivering head and foot,
As with sick soul and blind averted face
He trusted hand forth to obey his friend,—
Should find no wife in her cold hand's response,
Nor see the disenshrouded statue start
Alkestis, live the life and love the love!
I wonder, does the streamlet ripple still,
Outsmoothing galingale and watermint
Its mat-floor? while at brim, 'twixt sedge and sedge,
What bubblings past Baccheion, broadened much,
Pricked by the reed and fretted by the fly,
Oared by the boatman-spider's pair of arms!
Lenaia was a gladsome month ago—
Euripides had taught "Andromedé:"
Next month, would teach "Kresphontes"—which
same month
Someone from Phokis, who companioned me
Since all that happened on those temple-steps,
Would marry me and turn Athenian too.
Now! if next year the masters let the slaves
Do Bacchic service and restore mankind
That trilogy whereof, 't is noised, one play
Presents the Bacchai,—no Euripides

Will teach the choros, nor shall we be tinged
By any such grand sunset of his soul,
Exiles from dead Athenai,—not the live
That 's in the cloud there with the new-born star!

Speak to the infinite intelligence,
Sing to the everlasting sympathy!
Winds belly sail, and drench of dancing brine
Buffet our boat-side, so the prore bound free!
Condense our voyage into one great day
Made up of sunset-closes: eve by eve,
Resume that memorable night-discourse
When,—like some meteor-brilliance, fire and filth,
Or say, his own Amphitheos, deity
And dung, who, bound on the gods' embassage,
Got men's acknowledgment in kick and cuff—
We made acquaintance with a visitor
Ominous, apparitional, who went
Strange as he came, but shall not pass away.
Let us attempt that memorable talk,
Clothe the adventure's every incident
With due expression: may not looks be told,
Gesture made speak, and speech so amplified
That words find blood-warmth which, cold-writ, they lose?

Recall the night we heard the news from Thrace,

One year ago, Athenai still herself.

We two were sitting silent in the house,
Yet cheerless hardly. Euthukles, forgive!
I somehow speak to unseen auditors.
Not *you*, but—Euthukles had entered, grave,
Grand, may I say, as who brings laurel-branch
And message from the tripod: such it proved.

He first removed the garland from his brow,
Then took my hand and looked into my face.

"Speak good words!" much misgiving faltered I.

"Good words, the best, Balaustion! He is crowned,
Gone with his Attic ivy home to feast,
Since Aischulos required companionship.
Pour a libation for Euripides!"

When we had sat the heavier silence out—
"Dead and triumphant still!" began reply
To my eye's question. "As he willed he worked:
And, as he worked, he wanted not, be sure,
Triumph his whole life through, submitting work
To work's right judges, never to the wrong—
To competency, not ineptitude.

When he had run life's proper race and worked
Quite to the stade's end, there remained to try
The stade's turn, should strength dare the double
course.
Half the diaulos reached, the hundred plays
Accomplished, force in its rebound sufficed
To lift along the athlete and ensure
A second wreath, proposed by fools for first,
The statist's olive as the poet's bay.
Wiselier, he suffered not a twofold aim
Retard his pace, confuse his sight: at once
Poet and statist; though the multitude
Girded him ever 'All thine aim thine art?
The idle poet only? No regard
For civic duty, public service, here?
We drop our ballot-bean for Sophokles!
Not only could he write "Antigoné,"
But—since (we argued) whoso penned that piece
Might just as well conduct a squadron,—straight
Good-naturedly he took on him command,
Got laughed at, and went back to making plays,
Having allowed us our experiment
Respecting the fit use of faculty.'
No whit the more did athlete slacken pace.
Soon the jeers grew: 'Cold hater of his kind,
A sea-cave suits him, not the vulgar hearth!

What need of tongue-talk, with a bookish store
Would stock ten cities?' Shadow of an ass!
No whit the worse did athlete touch the mark
And, at the turning-point, consign his scorn
O' the scorners to that final trilogy
'Hupsipule,' 'Phoinissai,' and the Match
Of Life Contemplative with Active Life,
Zethos against Amphion. Ended so?
Nowise!—began again; for heroes rest
Dropping shield's oval o'er the entire man,
And he who thus took Contemplation's prize
Turned stade-point but to face Activity.
Out of all shadowy hands extending help
For life's decline pledged to youth's labour still,
Whatever renovation flatter age,—
Society with pastime, solitude
With peace,—he chose the hand that gave the heart,
Bade Macedonian Archelaos take
The leavings of Athenai, ash once flame.
For fifty politicians' frosty work,
One poet's ash proved ample and to spare:
He propped the state and filled the treasury,
Counselled the king as might a meaner soul,
Furnished the friend with what shall stand in stead
Of crown and sceptre, star his name about
When these are dust; for him, Euripides

Last the old hand on the old phorminx flung,
Clashed thence 'Alkaion,' maddened 'Pentheus' up;
Then music sighed itself away, one moan
Iphigeneia made by Aulis' strand;
With her and music died Euripides.

"The poet-friend who followed him to Thrace,
Agathon, writes thus much: the merchant-ship
Moreover brings a message from the king
To young Euripides, who went on board
This morning at Mounuchia: all is true."

I said "Thank Zeus for the great news and good!"

"Nay, the report is running in brief fire
Through the town's stubbly furrow," he resumed:
—"Entertains brightly what their favourite styles
'The City of Gapers' for a week perhaps,
Supplants three luminous tales, but yesterday
Pronounced sufficient lamps to last the month:
How Glauketes, outbidding Morsimos,
Paid market-price for one Kopaic eel
A thousand drachmai, and then cooked his prize
Not proper conger-fashion but in oil
And nettles, as man fries the foam-fish-kind;
How all the captains of the triremes, late

Victors at Arginousai, on return
Will, for reward, be straightway put to death;
How Mikon wagered a Thessalian mime
Trained him by Lais, looked on as complete,
Against Leogoras' blood-mare koppa-marked,
Valued six talents,—swore, accomplished so,
The girl could swallow at a draught, nor breathe,
A choinix of unmixed Mendesian wine;
And having lost the match will—dine on herbs!
Three stories late a-flame, at once extinct,
Outblazed by just 'Euripides is dead'!

"I met the concourse from the Theatre,
The audience flocking homeward: victory
Again awarded Aristophanes
Precisely for his old play chopped and changed
'The Female Celebrators of the Feast'—
That Thesmophoria, tried a second time.
'Never such full success!'—assured the folk,
Who yet stopped praising to have word of mouth
With 'Euthukles, the bard's own intimate,
Balaustion's husband, the right man to ask.'

"'Dead, yes, but how dead, may acquaintance know?
You were the couple constant at his cave:
Tell us now, is it true that women, moved

By reason of his liking Krateros . . .'

"I answered 'He was loved by Sokrates.'

"'Nay,' said another, 'envy did the work!
For, emulating poets of the place,
One Arridaios, one Krateues, both
Established in the royal favour, these . . .'

"Protagoras instructed him," said I.

"'*Phu*,' whistled Comic Platon, 'hear the fact!
'T was well said of your friend by Sophokles
"He hate our women? In his verse, belike:
But when it comes to prose-work,—ha, ha, ha!"
New climes don't change old manners: so, it chanced,
Pursuing an intrigue one moonless night
With Arethousian Nikodikos' wife,
(Come now, his years were simply seventy-five)
Crossing the palace-court, what haps he on
But Archelaos' pack of hungry hounds?
Who tore him piecemeal ere his cry brought help.'

"I asked: Did not you write 'The Festivals'?
You best know what dog tore him when alive.
You others, who now make a ring to hear,

Have not you just enjoyed a second treat,
Proclaimed that ne'er was play more worthy prize
Than this, myself assisted at, last year,
And gave its worth to,—spitting on the same?
Appraise no poetry,—price cuttlefish,
Or that seaweed-alphestes, scorpion-sort,
Much famed for mixing mud with fantasy
On midnights! I interpret no foul dreams."

If so said Euthukles, so could not I,
Balaustion, say. After "Lusistraté"
No more for me of "people's privilege,"
No witnessing "the Grand old Comedy
Coëval with our freedom, which, curtailed,
Were freedom's deathblow: relic of the past,
When Virtue laughingly told truth to Vice,
Uncensured, since the stern mouth, stuffed with flowers,
Through poetry breathed satire, perfumed blast
Which sense snuffed up while searched unto the bone!"
I was a stranger: "For first joy," urged friends,
"Go hear our Comedy, some patriot piece
That plies the selfish advocates of war
With argument so unevadable
That crash fall Kleons whom the finer play

Of reason, tickling, deeper wounds no whit
Than would a spear-thrust from a savory-stalk!
No: you hear knave and fool told crime and fault,
And see each scourged his quantity of stripes.
'Rough dealing, awkward language,' whine our fops:
The world 's too squeamish now to bear plain words
Concerning deeds it acts with gust enough:
But, thanks to wine-lees and democracy,
We 've still our stage where truth calls spade a spade!
Ashamed? Phuromachos' decree provides
The sex may sit discreetly, witness all,
Sorted, the good with good, the gay with gay,
Themselves unseen, no need to force a blush.
A Rhodian wife and ignorant so long?
Go hear next play!"
I heard "Lusistraté."
Waves, said to wash pollution from the world,
Take that plague-memory, cure that pustule caught
As, past escape, I sat and saw the piece
By one appalled at Phaidra's fate,—the chaste,
Whom, because chaste, the wicked goddess chained
To that same serpent of unchastity
She loathed most, and who, coiled so, died distraught
Rather than make submission, loose one limb
Love-wards, at lambency of honeyed tongue,
Or torture of the scales which scraped her snow

—I say, the piece by him who charged this piece
(Because Euripides shrank not to teach,
If gods be strong and wicked, man, though weak,
May prove their match by willing to be good)
With infamies the Scythian's whip should cure—
"Such outrage done the public—Phaidra named!
Such purpose to corrupt ingenuous youth,
Such insult cast on female character!"—
Why, when I saw that bestiality—
So beyond all brute-beast imagining,
That when, to point the moral at the close,
Poor Salabaccho, just to show how fair
Was "Reconciliation," stripped her charms,
That exhibition simply bade us breathe,
Seemed something healthy and commendable
After obscenity grotesqued so much
It slunk away revolted at itself.
Henceforth I had my answer when our sage
Pattern-proposing seniors pleaded grave
"You fail to fathom here the deep design!
All 's acted in the interest of truth,
Religion, and those manners old and dear
Which made our city great when citizens
Like Aristeides and like Miltiades
Wore each a golden tettix in his hair."
What do they wear now under—Kleophon?

Well, for such reasons,—I am out of breath,
But loathsomeness we needs must hurry past,—
I did not go to see, nor then nor now,
The "Thesmophoriazousai." But, since males
Choose to brave first, blame afterward, nor brand
Without fair taste of what they stigmatize,
Euthukles had not missed the first display,
Original portrait of Euripides
By "Virtue laughingly reproving Vice":
"Virtue,"—the author, Aristophanes,
Who mixed an image out of his own depths,
Ticketed as I tell you. Oh, this time
No more pretension to recondite worth!
No joke in aid of Peace, no demagogue
Pun-pelleted from Pnux, no kordax-dance
Overt helped covertly the Ancient Faith!
All now was muck, home-produce, honestman
The author's soul secreted to a play
Which gained the prize that day we heard the death.

I thought "How thoroughly death alters things!
Where is the wrong now, done our dead and great?
How natural seems grandeur in relief,
Cliff-base with frothy spites against its calm!"

Euthukles interposed—he read my thought—

"O'er them, too, in a moment came the change.
The crowd 's enthusiastic, to a man:
Since, rake as such may please the ordure-heap
Because of certain sparkles presumed ore,
At first flash of true lightning overhead,
They look up, nor resume their search too soon.
The insect-scattering sign is evident,
And nowhere winks a fire-fly rival now,
Nor bustles any beetle of the brood
With trundled dung-ball meant to menace heaven.
Contrariwise, the cry is 'Honour him!'
'A statue in the theatre!' wants one;
Another 'Bring the poet's body back,
Bury him in Peiraios: o'er his tomb
Let Alkamenes carve the music-witch,
The songstress-seiren, meed of melody:
Thoukudides invent his epitaph!'
To-night the whole town pays its tribute thus."

Our tribute should not be the same, my friend!
Statue? Within our heart he stood, he stands!
As for the vest outgrown now by the form,
Low flesh that clothed high soul,—a vesture's fate—
Why, let it fade, mix with the elements
There where it, falling, freed Euripides!
But for the soul that 's tutelary now

Till time end, o'er the world to teach and bless—
How better hail its freedom than by first
Singing, we two, its own song back again,
Up to that face from which flowed beauty—face
Now abler to see triumph and take love
Than when it glorified Athenai once?

The sweet and strange Alkestis, which saved me,
Secured me—you, ends nowise, to my mind,
In pardon of Admetos. Hearts are fain
To follow cheerful weary Herakles
Striding away from the huge gratitude,
Club shouldered, lion-fleece round loin and flank,
Bound on the next new labour "height o'er height
Ever surmounting,—destiny's decree!"
Thither He helps us: that 's the story's end;
He smiling said so, when I told him mine—
My great adventure, how Alkestis helped.
Afterward, when the time for parting fell,
He gave me, with two other precious gifts,
This third and best, consummating the grace,
"Herakles," writ by his own hand, each line.

"If it have worth, reward is still to seek.
Somebody, I forget who, gained the prize
And proved arch-poet: time must show!" he smiled:

"Take this, and, when the noise tires out, judge me—
Some day, not slow to dawn, when somebody—
Who? I forget—proves nobody at all!"

Is not that day come? What if you and I
Re-sing the song, inaugurate the fame?
We have not waited to acquaint ourselves
With song and subject; we can prologuize
How, at Eurustheus' bidding,—hate strained hard,—
Herakles had departed, one time more,
On his last labour, worst of all the twelve;
Descended into Haides, thence to drag
The triple-headed hound, which sun should see
Spite of the god whose darkness whelped the Fear.
Down went the hero, "back—how should he come?"
So laughed King Lukos, an old enemy,
Who judged that absence testified defeat
Of the land's loved one,—since he saved the land
And for that service wedded Megara
Daughter of Thebai, realm her child should rule.
Ambition, greed and malice seized their prey,
The Heracleian House, defenceless left,
Father and wife and child, to trample out
Trace of its hearth-fire: since extreme old age
Wakes pity, woman's wrong wins championship,
And child may grow up man and take revenge.

Hence see we that, from out their palace-home
Hunted, for last resource they cluster now
Couched on the cold ground, hapless supplicants
About their courtyard altar,—Household Zeus
It is, the Three in funeral garb beseech,
Delaying death so, till deliverance come—
When did it ever?—from the deep and dark.
And thus breaks silence old Amphitruon's voice. . . .
Say I not true thus far, my Euthukles?

Suddenly, torch-light! knocking at the door,
Loud, quick, "Admittance for the revels' lord!"
Some unintelligible Komos-cry—
Raw-flesh red, no cap upon his head,
Dionusos, Bacchos, Phales, Iacchos,
In let him reel with the kid-skin at his heel,
Where it buries in the spread of the bushy myrtle-
bed!
(Our Rhodian Jackdaw-song was sense to that!)
Then laughter, outbursts ruder and more rude,
Through which, with silver point, a fluting pierced,
And ever "Open, open, Bacchos bids!"

But at last—one authoritative word,
One name of an immense significance:
For Euthukles rose up, threw wide the door.

There trooped the Choros of the Comedy
Crowned and triumphant; first, those flushed Fifteen
Men that wore women's garb, grotesque disguise.
Then marched the Three,—who played Mnesilochos,
Who, Toxotes, and who, robed right, masked rare,
Monkeyed our Great and Dead to heart's content
That morning in Athenai. Masks were down
And robes doffed now; the sole disguise was drink.

Mixing with these—I know not what gay crowd,
Girl-dancers, flute-boys, and pre-eminent
Among them,—doubtless draped with such reserve
As stopped fear of the fifty-drachma fine
(Beside one's name on public fig-tree nailed)
Which women pay who in the streets walk bare,—
Behold Elaphion of the Persic dance!
Who lately had frisked fawn-foot, and the rest,
—All for the Patriot Cause, the Antique Faith,
The Conservation of True Poesy—
Could I but penetrate the deep design!
Elaphion, more Peiraios-known as "Phaps,"
Tripped at the head of the whole banquet-band
Who came in front now, as the first fell back;
And foremost—the authoritative voice,
The revels-leader, he who gained the prize,
And got the glory of the Archon's feast—

There stood in person Aristophanes.

And no ignoble presence! On the bulge
Of the clear baldness,—all his head one brow,—
True, the veins swelled, blue network, and there surged
A red from cheek to temple,—then retired
As if the dark-leaved chaplet damped a flame,—
Was never nursed by temperance or health.
But huge the eyeballs rolled back native fire,
Imperiously triumphant: nostrils wide
Waited their incense; while the pursed mouth's pout
Aggressive, while the beak supreme above,
While the head, face, nay, pillared throat thrown back,
Beard whitening under like a vinous foam,
These made a glory, of such insolence—
I thought,—such domineering deity
Hephaistos might have carved to cut the brine
For his gay brother's prow, imbrue that path
Which, purpling, recognized the conqueror.
Impudent and majestic: drunk, perhaps,
But that 's religion; sense too plainly snuffed:
Still, sensuality was grown a rite.

What I had disbelieved most proved most true.
There was a mind here, mind a-wantoning
At ease of undisputed mastery

Over the body's brood, those appetites.
Oh but he grasped them grandly, as the god
His either struggling handful,—hurtless snakes
Held deep down, strained hard off from side and side!
Mastery his, theirs simply servitude,
So well could firm fist help intrepid eye.
Fawning and fulsome, had they licked and hissed?
At mandate of one muscle, order reigned.
They had been wreathing much familiar now
About him on his entry; but a squeeze
Choked down the pests to place: their lord stood free.

Forward he stepped: I rose and fronted him.

"Hail, house, the friendly to Euripides!"
(So he began) "Hail, each inhabitant!
You, lady? What, the Rhodian? Form and face,
Victory's self upsoaring to receive
The poet? Right they named you . . some rich name,
Vowel-buds thorned about with consonants,
Fragrant, felicitous, rose-glow enriched
By the Isle's unguent: some diminished end
In *ion*, Kallistion? delicater still,
Kubelion or Melittion,—or, suppose
(Less vulgar love than bee or violet)
Phibalion, for the mouth split red-fig-wise,

Korakinidion for the coal-black hair,
Nettarion, Phabion for the darlingness?
But no, it was some fruit-flower, Rhoidion . . . ha,
We near the balsam-bloom—Balaustion! Thanks,
Rhodes! Folk have called me Rhodian, do you know?
Not fools so far! Because, if Helios wived,
As Pindaros sings somewhere prettily,
Here blooms his offspring, earth-flesh with sun-fire,
Rhodes' blood and Helios' gold. My phorminx, boy!
Why does the boy hang back and baulk an ode
Tiptoe at spread of wing? But like enough,
Sunshine frays torchlight. Witness whom you scare,
Superb Balaustion! Look outside the house!
Pho, you have quenched my Komos by first frown
Struck dead all joyance: not a fluting puffs
From idle cheekband! Ah, my Choros too?
You 've eaten cuckoo-apple? Dumb, you dogs?
So much good Thasian wasted on your throats
And out of them not one *Threttanelo?*
Neblaretai! Because this earth-and-sun
Product looks wormwood and all bitter herbs?
Well, do I blench, though me she hates the most
Of mortals? By the cabbage, off they slink!
You, too, my Chrusomelolonthion-Phaps,
Girl-goldling-beetle-beauty? You, abashed,
Who late, supremely unabashable,

Propped up my play at that important point
When Artamouxia tricks the Toxotes?
Ha, ha,—thank Hermes for the lucky throw,—
We came last comedy of the whole seven,
So went all fresh to judgment well-disposed
For who should fatly feast them, eye and ear,
We two between us! What, you fail your friend?
Away then, free me of your cowardice!
Go, get you the goat's breakfast! Fare afield,
Ye circumcised of Egypt, pigs to sow,
Back to the Priest's or forward to the crows,
So you but rid me of such company!
Once left alone, I can protect myself
From statuesque Balaustion pedestalled
On much disapprobation and mistake!
She dares not beat the sacred brow, beside!
Bacchos' equipment, ivy safeguards well
As Phoibos' bay.

"They take me at my word!
One comfort is, I shall not want them long,
The Archon's cry creaks, creaks, 'Curtail expense!'
The war wants money, year the twenty-sixth!
Cut down our Choros number, clip costume,
Save birds' wings, beetles' armour, spend the cash
In three-crest skull-caps, three days' salt-fish-slice,

Three-banked-ships for these sham-ambassadors,
And what not: any cost but Comedy's!
'No Choros'—soon will follow; what care I?
Archinos and Agurrhios, scrape your flint,
Flay your dead dog, and curry favour so!
Choros in rags, with loss of leather next,
We lose the boys' vote, lose the song and dance,
Lose my Elaphion! Still, the actor stays.
Save but my acting, and the baldhead bard
Kudathenaian and Pandionid,
Son of Philippos, Aristophanes
Surmounts his rivals now as heretofore,
Though stinted to mere sober prosy verse—
'Manners and men,' so squeamish gets the world!
No more 'Step forward, strip for anapæsts!'
No calling naughty people by their names,
No tickling audience into gratitude
With chickpease, barleygroats and nuts and plums,
No setting Salabaccho . . ."

As I turned—

"True, lady, I am tolerably drunk:
The proper inspiration! Otherwise,—
Phrunichos, Choirilos!—had Aischulos
So foiled you at the goat-song? Drink 's a god.

How else did that old doating driveller
Kratinos foil me, match my masterpiece
The 'Clouds'? I swallowed cloud-distilment—dew
Undimmed by any grape-blush, knit my brow
And gnawed my style and laughed my learnedest;
While he worked at his 'Willow-wicker-flask,'
Swigging at that same flask by which he swore,
Till, sing and empty, sing and fill again,
Somehow result was—what it should not be
Next time, I promised him and kept my word!
Hence, brimful now of Thasian . . . I 'll be bound,
Mendesian, merely: triumph-night, you know,
The High Priest entertains the conqueror,
And, since war worsens all things, stingily
The rascal starves whom he is bound to stuff,
Choros and actors and their lord and king
The poet; supper, still he needs must spread—
And this time all was conscientious fare:
He knew his man, his match, his master—made
Amends, spared neither fish, flesh, fowl nor wine:
So merriment increased, I promise you,
Till—something happened."

Here he strangely paused.

"After that,—well, it either was the cup

To the Good Genius, our concluding pledge,
That wrought me mischief, decently unmixed,—
Or, what if, when *that* happened, need arose
Of new libation? Did you only know
What happened! Little wonder I am drunk."

Euthukles, o'er the boat-side, quick, what change,
Watch, in the water! But a second since,
It laughed a ripply spread of sun and sea,
Ray fused with wave, to never disunite.
Now, sudden all the surface, hard and black,
Lies a quenched light, dead motion: what the cause?
Look up and lo, the menace of a cloud
Has solemnized the sparkling, spoiled the sport!
Just so, some overshadow, some new care
Stopped all the mirth and mocking on his face
And left there only such a dark surmise
—No wonder if the revel disappeared,
So did his face shed silence every side!
I recognized a new man fronting me.

"So!" he smiled, piercing to my thought at once,
"You see myself? Balaustion's fixed regard
Can strip the proper Aristophanes
Of what our sophists, in their jargon, style
His accidents? My soul sped forth but now

To meet your hostile survey,—soul unseen,
Yet veritably cinct for soul-defence
With satyr sportive quips, cranks, boss and spike,
Just as my visible body paced the street,
Environed by a boon companionship
Your apparition also puts to flight.
Well, what care I if, unaccoutred twice,
I front my foe—no comicality
Round soul, and body-guard in banishment?
Thank your eyes' searching, undisguised I stand:
The merest female child may question me.
Spare not, speak bold, Balaustion!"

I did speak:

"Bold speech be—welcome to this honoured hearth,
Good Genius! Glory of the poet, glow
O' the humourist who castigates his kind,
Suave summer-lightning lambency which plays
On stag-horned tree, misshapen crag askew,
Then vanishes with unvindictive smile
After a moment's laying black earth bare.
Splendour of wit that springs a thunderball—
Satire—to burn and purify the world,
True aim, fair purpose: just wit justly strikes
Injustice,—right, as rightly quells the wrong,

Finds out in knaves', fools', cowards' armoury
The tricky tinselled place fire flashes through,
No damage else, sagacious of true ore;
Wit, learned in the laurel, leaves each wreath
O'er lyric shell or tragic barbiton,—
Though alien gauds be singed,—undesecrate,
The genuine solace of the sacred brow.
Ay, and how pulses flame a patriot-star
Steadfast athwart our country's night of things,
To beacon, would she trust no meteor-blaze,
Athenai from the rock she steers for straight!
O light, light, light, I hail light everywhere,
No matter for the murk that was,—perchance,
That will be,—certes, never should have been
Such orb's associate!

"Aristophanes!
'The merest female child may question you?'
Once, in my Rhodes, a portent of the wave
Appalled our coast: for many a darkened day,
Intolerable mystery and fear.
Who snatched a furtive glance through crannied peak,
Could but report of snake-scale, lizard-limb,—
So swam what, making whirlpools as it went,
Madded the brine with wrath or monstrous sport.
''T is Tuphon, loose, unmanacled from mount,'

Declared the priests, 'no way appeasable
Unless perchance by virgin-sacrifice!'
Thus grew the terror and o'erhung the doom—
Until one eve a certain female-child
Strayed in safe ignorance to seacoast edge,
And there sat down and sang to please herself.
When all at once, large-looming from his wave,
Out leaned, chin hand-propped, pensive on the ledge,
A sea-worn face, sad as mortality,
Divine with yearning after fellowship.
He rose but breast-high. So much god she saw;
So much she sees now, and does reverence!"

Ah, but there followed tail-splash, frisk of fin!
Let cloud pass, the sea's ready laugh outbreaks.
No very godlike trace retained the mouth
Which mocked with—

"So, He taught you tragedy!
I always asked 'Why may not women act?'
Nay, wear the comic visor just as well;
Or, better, quite cast off the face-disguise
And voice-distortion, simply look and speak,
Real women playing women as men—men!
I shall not wonder if things come to that,
Some day when I am distant far enough.

Do you conceive the quite new Comedy
When laws allow? laws only let girls dance,
Pipe, posture,—above all, Elaphionize,
Provided they keep decent—that is, dumb.
Ay, and, conceiving, I would execute,
Had I but two lives: one were overworked!
How penetrate encrusted prejudice,
Pierce ignorance three generations thick
Since first Sousarion crossed our boundary?
He battered with a big Megaric stone;
Chionides felled oak and rough-hewed thence
This club I wield now, having spent my life
In planing knobs and sticking studs to shine;
Somebody else must try mere polished steel!"

Emboldened by the sober mood's return,
"Meanwhile," said I, "since planed and studded club
Once more has pashed competitors to dust,
And poet proves triumphant with that play
Euthukles found last year unfortunate,—
Does triumph spring from smoothness still more smoothed,
Fresh studs sown thick and threefold? In plain words,
Have you exchanged brute-blows,—which teach the brute
Man may surpass him in brutality,—
For human fighting, or true god-like force
Which breathes persuasion nor needs fight at all?

Have you essayed attacking ignorance,
Convicting folly, by their opposites,
Knowledge and wisdom? not by yours for ours,
Fresh ignorance and folly, new for old,
Greater for less, your crime for our mistake!
If so success at last have crowned desert,
Bringing surprise (dashed haply by concern
At your discovery such wild waste of strength
—And what strength!—went so long to keep in vogue
Such warfare—and what warfare!—shamed so fast,
So soon made obsolete, as fell their foe
By the first arrow native to the orb,
First onslaught worthy Aristophanes)—
Was this conviction's entry that same strange
'Something that happened' to confound your feast?"

"Ah, did he witness then my play that failed,
First 'Thesmophoriazousai'? Well and good!
But did he also see,—your Euthukles,—
My 'Grasshoppers' which followed and failed too,
Three months since, at the 'Little-in-the-Fields'?"

"To say that he did see that First—should say
He never cared to see its following."

"There happens to be reason why I wrote

First play and second also. Ask the cause!
I warrant you receive ere talk be done,
Fit answer, authorizing either act.
But here 's the point: as Euthukles made vow
Never again to taste my quality,
So I was minded next experiment
Should tickle palate—yea, of Euthukles!
Not by such utter change, such absolute
A topsyturvy of stage-habitude
As you and he want,—Comedy built fresh,
By novel brick and mortar, base to roof,—
No, for I stand too near and look too close!
Pleasure and pastime yours, spectators brave,
Should I turn art's fixed fabric upside down!
Little you guess how such tough work tasks soul!
Not overtasks, though: give fit strength fair play,
And strength 's a demiourgos! Art renewed?
Ay, in some closet where strength shuts out—first
The friendly faces, sympathetic cheer:
'More of the old provision none supplies
So bounteously as thou,—our love, our pride,
Our author of the many a perfect piece!
Stick to that standard, change were decadence!'
Next, the unfriendly: 'This time, strain will tire,
He 's fresh, Ameipsias thy antagonist!'
—Or better, in some Salaminian cave

Where sky and sea and solitude make earth
And man and noise one insignificance,
Let strength propose itself,—behind the world,—
Sole prize worth winning, work that satisfies
Strength it has dared and done strength's uttermost!
After which,—clap-to closet and quit cave,—
Strength may conclude in Archelaos' court,
And yet esteem the silken company
So much sky-scud, sea-froth, earth-thistledown,
For aught their praise or blame should joy or grieve.
Strength amid crowds as late in solitude
May lead the still life, ply the wordless task:
Then only, when seems need to move or speak,
Moving—for due respect, when statesmen pass,
(Strength, in the closet, watched how spiders spin)
Speaking—when fashion shows intelligence,
(Strength, in the cave, oft whistled to the gulls)
In short, has learnt first, practised afterwards!
Despise the world and reverence yourself,—
Why, you may unmake things and remake things,
And throw behind you, unconcerned enough,
What's made or marred: 'you teach men, are not taught!'
So marches off the stage Euripides!

"No such thin fare feeds flesh and blood like mine

No such faint fume of fancy sates my soul,
No such seclusion, closet, cave or court,
Suits either: give me Iostephanos
Worth making happy what coarse way she will—
O happy-maker, when her cries increase
About the favourite! 'Aristophanes!
More grist to mill, here 's Kleophon to grind!
He 's for refusing peace, though Sparté cede
Even Dekeleia! Here 's Kleonumos
Declaring—though he threw away his shield,
He 'll thrash you till you lay your lyre aside!
Orestes bids mind where you walk of nights—
He wants your cloak as you his cudgelling:
Here 's, finally, Melanthios fat with fish,
The gormandizer-spendthrift-dramatist!
So, bustle! Pounce on opportunity!
Let fun a-screaming in Parabasis,
Find food for folk agape at either end,
Mad for amusement! Times grow better too,
And should they worsen, why, who laughs, forgets.
In no case, venture boy-experiments!
Old wine 's the wine: new poetry drinks raw:
Two plays a season is your pledge, beside;
So, give us 'Wasps' again, grown hornets now!'"

Then he changed.

"Do you so detect in me—
Brow-bald, chin-bearded, me, curved cheek, carved lip,
Or where soul sits and reigns in either eye—
What suits the—stigma, I say,—style say you,
Of 'Wine-lees-poet'? Bravest of buffoons,
Less blunt than Telekleides, less obscene
Than Murtilos, Hermippos: quite a match
In elegance for Eupolis himself,
Yet pungent as Kratinos at his best?
Graced with traditional immunity
Ever since, much about my grandsire's time,
Some funny village-man in Megara,
Lout-lord and clown-king, used a privilege,
As due religious drinking-bouts came round,
To daub his phyz,—no, that was afterward,—
He merely mounted cart with mates of choice
And traversed country, taking house by house,
At night,—because of danger in the freak,—
Then hollaed 'Skin-flint starves his labourers!
Clench-fist stows figs away, cheats government!
Such an one likes to kiss his neighbour's wife,
And beat his own; while such another . . . Boh!'
Soon came the broad day, circumstantial tale,
Dancing and verse, and there 's our Comedy,
There 's Mullos, there 's Euetes, there 's the stock
I shall be proud to graft my powers upon!

Protected? Punished quite as certainly
When Archons pleased to lay down each his law,—
Your Morucheides-Surakosios sort,—
Each season, 'No more naming citizens,
Only abuse the vice, the vicious spare!
Observe, henceforth no Areopagite
Demean his rank by writing Comedy!'
(They one and all could write the 'Clouds' of course.)
'Needs must we nick expenditure, allow
Comedy half a choros, supper—none,
Times being hard, while applicants increase
For, what costs cash, the Tragic Trilogy.'
Lofty Tragedians! How they lounge aloof
Each with his Triad, three plays to my one,
Not counting the contemptuous fourth, the frank
Concession to mere mortal levity,
Satyric pittance tossed our beggar-world!
Your proud Euripides from first to last
Doled out some five such, never deigned us more!
And these—what curds and whey for marrowy wine!
That same Alkestis you so rave about
Passed muster with him for a Satyr-play,
The prig!—why trifle time with toys and skits
When he could stuff four ragbags sausage-wise
With sophistry, with bookish odds and ends,
Sokrates, meteors, moonshine, 'Life 's not Life,'

'The tongue swore, but unsworn the mind remains,'
And fifty such concoctions, crab-tree-fruit
Digested while, head low and heels in heaven,
He lay, let Comics laugh—for privilege!
Looked puzzled on, or pityingly off,
But never dreamed of paying gibe by jeer,
Buffet by blow: plenty of proverb-pokes
At vice and folly, wicked kings, mad mobs!
No sign of wincing at my Comic lash,
No protest against infamous abuse,
Malignant censure,—nought to prove I scourged
With tougher thong than leek-and-onion-plait!
If ever he glanced gloom, aggrieved at all,
The aggriever must be—Aischulos perhaps:
Or Sophokles he 'd take exception to.
—Do you detect in me—in me, I ask,
The man like to accept this measurement
Of faculty, contentedly sit classed
Mere Comic Poet—since I wrote 'The Birds'?"

I thought there might lurk truth in jest's disguise.

"Thanks!" he resumed, so quick to construe smile!
"I answered—in my mind—these gapers thus:
Since old wine 's ripe and new verse raw, you judge—
What if I vary vintage-mode and mix

Blossom with must, give nosegay to the brew,
Fining, refining, gently, surely, till
The educated taste turns unawares
From customary dregs to draught divine?
Then answered—with my lips: More 'Wasps' you want?
Come next year and I give you 'Grasshoppers'!
And 'Grasshoppers' I gave them,—last month's play.
They formed the Choros. Alkibiades,
No longer Triphales but Trilophos,
(Whom I called Darling-of-the-Summertime,
Born to be nothing else but beautiful
And brave, to eat, drink, love his life away)
Persuades the Tettix (our Autochthon-brood,
That sip the dew and sing on olive-branch
Above the ant-and-emmet populace)
To summon all who meadow, hill and dale
Inhabit—bee, wasp, woodlouse, dragonfly—
To band themselves against red nipper-nose
Stagbeetle, huge Taügetan (you guess—
Sparté) Athenai needs must battle with,
Because her sons are grown effeminate
To that degree—so morbifies their flesh
The poison-drama of Euripides,
Morals and music—there 's no antidote
Occurs save warfare which inspirits blood,
And brings us back perchance the blessed time

When (Choros takes up tale) our commonalty
Firm in primæval virtue, antique faith,
Ere earwig-sophist plagued or pismire-sage,
Cockered no noddle up with A, b, g,
Book-learning, logic-chopping, and the moon,
But just employed their brains on '*Ruppapai*,
Row, boys, munch barley-bread, and take your ease—
Mindful, however, of the tier beneath!'
Ah, golden epoch! while the nobler sort
(Such needs must study, no contesting that!)
Wore no long curls but used to crop their hair,
Gathered the tunic well about the ham,
Remembering 't was soft sand they used for seat
At school-time, while—mark this—the lesson long,
No learner ever dared to cross his legs!
Then, if you bade him take the myrtle-bough
And sing for supper—'t was some grave romaunt
How man of Mitulené, wondrous wise,
Jumped into hedge, by mortals quickset called,
And there, anticipating Oidipous,
Scratched out his eyes and scratched them in again.
None of your Phaidras, Augés, Kanakés,
To mincing music, turn, trill, tweedle-trash,
Whence comes that Marathon is obsolete!
Next, my Antistrophé was—praise of Peace:
Ah, could our people know what Peace implies!

Home to the farm and furrow! Grub one's vine,
Romp with one's Thratta, pretty serving-girl,
When wifie 's busy bathing! Eat and drink,
And drink and eat, what else is good in life?
Slice hare, toss pancake, gaily gurgle down
The Thasian grape in celebration due
Of Bacchos! Welcome, dear domestic rite,
When wife and sons and daughters, Thratta too,
Pour peasoup as we chant delectably
In Bacchos reels, his tunic at his heels!
Enough, you comprehend,—I do at least!
Then,—be but patient,—the Parabasis!
Pray! For in that I also pushed reform.
None of the self-laudation, vulgar brag,
Vainglorious rivals cultivate so much!
No! If some merest word in Art's defence
Justice demanded of me,—never fear!
Claim was preferred, but dignifiedly.
A cricket asked a locust (winged, you know)
What he had seen most rare in foreign parts?
'I have flown far,' chirped he, 'North, East, South,
West,
And nowhere heard of poet worth a fig
If matched with Bald-head here, Aigina's boast,
Who in this play bids rivalry despair
Past, present, and to come, so marvellous

His Tragic, Comic, Lyric excellence!
Whereof the fit reward were (not to speak
Of dinner every day at public cost
I' the Prutaneion) supper with yourselves,
My Public, best dish offered bravest bard!'
No more! no sort of sin against good taste!
Then, satire,—Oh, a plain necessity!
But I won't tell you: for—could I dispense
With one more gird at old Ariphrades?
How scorpion-like he feeds on human flesh—
Ever finds out some novel infamy
Unutterable, inconceivable,
Which all the greater need was to describe
Minutely, each tail-twist at ink-shed time . . .
Now, what 's your gesture caused by? What you loathe,
Don't I loathe doubly, else why take such pains
To tell it you? But keep your prejudice!
My audience justified you! Housebreakers!
This pattern-purity was played and failed
Last Rural Dionusia—failed! for why?
Ameipsias followed with the genuine stuff.
He had been mindful to engage the Four—
Karkinos and his dwarf-crab-family—
Father and sons, they whirled like spinning-tops,
Choros gigantically poked his fun,
The boys' frank laugh relaxed the seniors' brow,

The skies re-echoed victory's acclaim,
Ameipsias gained his due, I got my dose
Of wisdom for the future. Purity?
No more of that next month, Athenai mine!
Contrive new cut of robe who will,—I patch
The old exomis, add no purple sleeve!
The Thesmophoriazousai, smartened up
With certain plaits, shall please, I promise you!

"Yes, I took up the play that failed last year,
And re-arranged things; threw adroitly in,—
No Parachoregema,—men to match
My women there already; and when these
(I had a hit at Aristullos here,
His plan how womankind should rule the roast)
Drove men to plough—'A-field, ye cribbed of cape!'
Men showed themselves exempt from service straight
Stupendously, till all the boys cried 'Brave!'
Then for the elders, I bethought me too,
Improved upon Mnesilochos' release
From the old bowman, board and binding-strap:
I made his son-in-law Euripides
Engage to put both shrewish wives away—
'Gravity' one, the other 'Sophist-lore'—
And mate with the Bald Bard's hetairai twain—
'Goodhumour' and 'Indulgence': on they tripped,

Murrhiné, Akalanthis,—'beautiful
Their whole belongings'—crowd joined choros there!
And while the Toxotes wound up his part
By shower of nuts and sweetmeats on the mob,
The woman-choros celebrated New
Kalligeneia, the frank last-day rite.
Brief, I was chairéd and caressed and crowned
And the whole theatre broke out a-roar,
Echoed my admonition—choros-cap—
Rivals of mine, your hands to your faces!
Summon no more the Muses, the Graces,
Since here by my side they have chosen their places!
And so we all flocked merrily to feast,
I, my choragos, choros, actors, mutes
And flutes aforesaid, friends in crowd, no fear,
At the Priest's supper; and hilarity
Grew none the less that, early in the piece,
Ran a report, from row to row close-packed,
Of messenger's arrival at the Port
With weighty tidings, 'Of Lusandros' flight,'
Opined one; 'That Euboia penitent
Sends the Confederation fifty ships,'
Preferred another; while 'The Great King's Eye
Has brought a present for Elaphion here,
That rarest peacock Kompolakuthes!'
Such was the supposition of a third.

'No matter what the news,' friend Strattis laughed,
'It won't be worse for waiting: while each click
Of the klepsudra sets a-shaking grave
Resentment in our shark's-head, boiled and spoiled
By this time: dished in Sphettian vinegar,
Silphion and honey, served with cocks'-brain-sauce!
So, swift to supper, Poet! No mistake,
This play; nor, like the unflavoured "Grasshoppers,"
Salt without thyme! Right merrily we supped,
Till—something happened.

"Out it shall, at last!

"Mirth drew to ending, for the cup was crowned
To the Triumphant! 'Kleonclapper erst,
Now, Plier of a scourge Euripides
Fairly turns tail from, flying Attiké
For Makedonia's rocks and frosts and bears,
Where, furry grown, he growls to match the squeak
Of girl-voiced, crocus-vested Agathon!
Ha ha, he he!' When suddenly a knock—
Sharp, solitary, cold, authoritative.

"'*Babaiax!* Sokrates a-passing by,
A-peering in for Aristullos' sake,
To put a question touching Comic Law?'

"No! Enters an old pale-swathed majesty,
Makes slow mute passage through two ranks as mute,
(Strattis stood up with all the rest, the sneak!)
Grey brow still bent on ground, upraised at length
When, our Priest reached, full-front the vision paused.

"'Priest!'—the deep tone succeeded the fixed gaze—
Thou carest that thy god have spectacle
Decent and seemly; wherefore I announce
That, since Euripides is dead to-day,
My Choros, at the Greater Feast, next month,
Shall, clothed in black, appear ungarlanded!'

"Then the grey brow sank low, and Sophokles
Re-swathed him, sweeping doorward: mutely passed
'Twixt rows as mute, to mingle possibly
With certain gods who convoy age to port;
And night resumed him.

"When our stupor broke,
Chirpings took courage, and grew audible.

'Dead—so one speaks now of Euripides!
Ungarlanded dance Choros, did he say?
I guess the reason: in extreme old age
No doubt such have the gods for visitants.
Why did he dedicate to Herakles

An altar else, but that the god, turned Judge,
Told him in dream who took the crown of gold?
He who restored Akropolis the theft,
Himself may feel perhaps a timely twinge
At thought of certain other crowns he filched
From —who now visits Herakles the Judge.
Instance "Medeia"! that play yielded palm
To Sophokles; and he again—to whom?
Euphorion! Why? Ask Herakles the Judge!'

'Ungarlanded, just means—economy!
Suppress robes, chaplets, everything suppress
Except the poet's present! An old tale
Put capitally by Trugaios—eh?
—News from the world of transformation strange!
How Sophokles is grown Simonides,
And,—aged, rotten,—all the same, for greed
Would venture on a hurdle out to sea!—
So jokes Philonides. Kallistratos
Retorts—Mistake! Instead of stinginess,
The fact is, in extreme decrepitude,
He has discarded poet and turned priest,
Priest of Half-Hero Alkon: visited
In his own house too by Asklepios' self,
So he avers. Meanwhile, his own estate
Lies fallow; Iophon 's the manager,—

Nay, touches up a play, brings out the same,
Asserts true sonship. See to what you sink
After your dozen-dozen prodigies!
Looking so old—Euripides seems young,
Born ten years later.'

'Just his tricky style!
Since, stealing first away, he wins first word
Out of good-natured rival Sophokles,
Procures himself no bad panegyric.
Had fate willed otherwise, himself were taxed
To pay survivor's-tribute,—harder squeezed
From anybody beaten first to last,
Than one who, steadily a conqueror,
Finds that his magnanimity is tasked
To merely make pretence and—beat itself!'

"So chirped the feasters though suppressedly.

"But I—what else do you suppose? —had pierced
Quite through friends' outside-straining, foes' mock-praise,
And reached conviction hearted under all.
Death's rapid line had closed a life's account,
And cut off, left unalterably clear
The summed-up value of Euripides.

Well, it might be the Thasian! Certainly
There sang suggestive music in my ears;
And, through—what sophists style—the wall of sense
My eyes pierced: death seemed life and life seemed death,
Envisaged that way, now, which I, before,
Conceived was just a moonstruck mood. Quite plain
There re-insisted,—ay, each prim stiff phrase
Of each old play, my still-new laughing-stock,
Had meaning, well worth poet's pains to state,
Should life prove half true life's term,—death, the rest.
As for the other question, late so large
Now all at once so little,—he or I,
Which better comprehended playwright craft,—
There, too, old admonition took fresh point.
As clear recurred our last word-interchange
Two years since, when I tried with 'Ploutos.' 'Vain!'
Saluted me the cold grave-bearded bard—
'Vain, this late trial, Aristophanes!
None baulks the genius with impunity!
You know what kind 's the nobler, what makes grave
Or what makes grin; there 's yet a nobler still,
Possibly,—what makes wise, not grave,—and glad,
Not grinning: whereby laughter joins with tears,
Tragic and Comic Poet prove one power,
And Aristophanes becomes our Fourth—

Nay, greatest! Never needs the Art stand still,
But those Art leans on lag, and none like you,
Her strongest of supports, whose step aside
Undoes the march: defection checks advance
Too late adventured! See the "Ploutos" here!
This step decides your foot from old to new—
Proves you relinquish song and dance and jest,
Discard the beast, and, rising from all-fours,
Fain would paint, manlike, actual human life,
Make veritable men think, say and do.
Here's the conception: which to execute,
Where's force? Spent! Ere the race began, was breath
O' the runner squandered on each friendly fool—
Wit-fireworks fizzed off while day craved no flame:
How should the night receive her due of fire
Flared out in Wasps and Horses, Clouds and Birds,
Prodigiously a-crackle? Rest content!
The new adventure for the novel man
Born to that next success myself foresee
In right of where I reach before I rest.
At end of a long course, straight all the way,
Well may there tremble somewhat into ken
The untrod path, clouds veiled from earlier gaze!
None may live two lives: I have lived mine through,
Die where I first stand still. You retrograde.
I leave my life's work. *I* compete with you,

My last with your last, my Antiope—
Phoinissai—with this Ploutos? No, I think!
Ever shall great and awful Victory
Accompany my life—in Maketis
If not Athenai. Take my farewell, friend!
Friend,—for from no consummate excellence
Like yours, whatever fault may countervail,
Do I profess estrangement: murk the marsh,
Yet where a solitary marble block
Blanches the gloom, there let the eagle perch!
You show—what splinters of Pentelikos,
Islanded by what ordure! Eagles fly,
Rest on the right place, thence depart as free;
But 'ware man's footstep, would it traverse mire
Untainted! Mire is safe for worms that crawl.'

"Balaustion! Here are very many words,
All to portray one moment's rush of thought,—
And much they do it! Still, you understand.
The Archon, the Feast-master, read their sum
And substance, judged the banquet-glow extinct,
So rose, discreetly if abruptly, crowned
The parting cup,—'To the Good Genius, then!'

"Up starts young Strattis for a final flash:
'Ay the Good Genius! To the Comic Muse,

She who evolves superiority,
Triumph and joy from sorrow, unsuccess
And all that 's incomplete in human life;
Who proves such actual failure transient wrong,
Since out of body uncouth, halt and maimed—
Since out of soul grotesque, corrupt or blank—
Fancy, uplifted by the Muse, can flit
To soul and body, re-instate them Man:
Beside which perfect man, how clear we see
Divergency from type was earth's effect!
Escaping whence by laughter,—Fancy's feat,—
We right man's wrong, establish true for false,—
Above misshapen body, uncouth soul,
Reach the fine form, the clear intelligence—
Above unseemliness, reach decent law,—
By laughter: attestation of the Muse
That low-and-ugsome is not signed and sealed
Incontrovertibly man's portion here,
Or, if here,—why, still high-and-fair exists
In that ethereal realm where laughs our soul
Lift by the Muse. Hail thou her ministrant!
Hail who accepted no deformity
In man as normal and remediless,
But rather pushed it to such gross extreme
That, outraged, we protest by eye's recoil
The opposite proves somewhere rule and law!

Hail who implied, by limning Lamachos,
Plenty and pastime wait on peace, not war!
Philokleon—better bear a wrong than plead,
Play the litigious fool to stuff the mouth
Of dikast with the due three-obol fee!
The Paphlagonian—stick to the old sway
Of few and wise, not rabble-government!
Trugaios, Pisthetairos, Strepsiades,—
Why multiply examples? Hail, in fine,
The hero of each painted monster—so
Suggesting the unpictured perfect shape!
Pour out! A laugh to Aristophanes!'

"Stay, my fine Strattis"—and I stopped applause—
'To the Good Genius—but the Tragic Muse!
She who instructs her poet, bids man's soul
Play man's part merely nor attempt the gods'
Ill-guessed of! Task humanity to height,
Put passion to prime use, urge will, unshamed
When will's last effort breaks in impotence!
No power forego, elude: no weakness,—plied
Fairly by power and will,—renounce, deny!
Acknowledge, in such miscalled weakness strength
Latent: and substitute thus things for words!
Make man run life's race fairly,—legs and feet,
Craving no false wings to o'erfly its length!

Trust on, trust ever, trust to end—in truth!
By truth of extreme passion, utmost will,
Shame back all false display of either force—
Barrier about such strenuous heat and glow,
That cowardice shall shirk contending,—cant,
Pretension, shrivel at truth's first approach!
Pour to the Tragic Muse's ministrant
Who, as he pictured pure Hippolutos,
Abolished our earth's blot Ariphrades;
Who, as he drew Bellerophon the bold,
Proclaimed Kleonumos incredible;
Who, as his Theseus towered up man once more,
Made Alkibiades shrink boy again!
A tear—no woman's tribute, weak exchange
For action, water spent and heart's-blood saved—
No man's regret for greatness gone, ungraced
Perchance by even that poor meed, man's praise—
But some god's superabundance of desire,
Yearning of will to 'scape necessity,—
Love's overbrimming for self-sacrifice,
Whence good might be, which never else may be,
By power displayed, forbidden this strait sphere,—
Effort expressible one only way—
Such tear from me fall to Euripides!"

The Thasian!—All, the Thasian, I account!

Whereupon outburst the whole company
Into applause and—laughter, would you think?

"The unrivalled one! How, never at a loss,
He turns the Tragic on its Comic side
Else imperceptible! Here 's death itself—
Death of a rival, of an enemy,—
Scarce seen as Comic till the master-touch
Made it acknowledge Aristophanes!
Lo, that Euripidean laurel-tree
Struck to the heart by lightning! Sokrates
Would question us, with buzz of how and why,
Wherefore the berry's virtue, the bloom's vice,
Till we all wished him quiet with his friend;
Agathon would compose an elegy,
Lyric bewailment fit to move a stone,
And, stones responsive, we might wince, 't is like;
Nay, with most cause of all to weep the least,
Sophokles ordains mourning for his sake
While we confess to a remorseful twinge:—
Suddenly, who but Aristophanes,
Prompt to the rescue, puts forth solemn hand,
Singles us out the tragic tree's best branch,
Persuades it groundward and, at tip, appends,
For votive-visor, Faun's goat-grinning face!
Back it flies, evermore with jest a-top,

And we recover the true mood, and laugh!"

"I felt as when some Nikias,—ninny-like
Troubled by sunspot-portent, moon-eclipse,—
At fault a little, sees no choice but sound
Retreat from foeman; and his troops mistake
The signal, and hail onset in the blast,
And at their joyous answer, *alalé*,
Back the old courage brings the scattered wits:
He wonders what his doubt meant, quick confirms
The happy error, blows the charge amain.
So I repaired things.

"Both be praised" thanked I.
"You who have laughed with Aristophanes,
You who wept rather with the Lord of Tears!
Priest, do thou, president alike o'er each,
Tragic and Comic function of the god,
Help with libation to the blended twain!
Either of which who serving, only serves—
Proclaims himself disqualified to pour
To that Good Genius—complex Poetry,
Uniting each god-grace, including both:
Which, operant for body as for soul,
Masters alike the laughter and the tears,
Supreme in lowliest earth, sublimest sky.

Who dares disjoin these,—whether he ignores
Body or soul, whichever half destroys,—
Maims the else perfect manhood, perpetrates
Again the inexpiable crime we curse—
Hacks at the Hermai, halves each guardian shape
Combining, nowise vainly, prominence
Of august head and enthroned intellect,
With homelier symbol of asserted sense,—
Nature's prime impulse, earthly appetite.
For, when our folly ventures on the freak,
Would fain abolish joy and fruitfulness,
Mutilate nature—what avails the Head
Left solitarily predominant,—
Unbodied soul,—not Hermes, both in one?
I, no more than our City, acquiesce
In such a desecration, but defend
Man's double nature—ay, wert thou its foe!
Could I once more, thou cold Euripides,
Encounter thee, in nought would I abate
My warfare, nor subdue my worst attack
On thee whose life-work preached 'Raise soul, sink sense!
Evirate Hermes!'—would avenge the god,
And justify myself. Once face to face,
Thou, the argute and tricksy, shouldst not wrap,
As thine old fashion was, in silent scorn

The breast that quickened at the sting of truth,
Nor turn from me, as, if the tale be true,
From Lais when she met thee in thy walks,
And questioned why she had no rights as thou:
Not so shouldst thou betake thee, be assured,
To book and pencil, deign me no reply!
I would extract an answer from those lips
So closed and cold, were mine the garden-chance!
Gone from the world! Does none remain to take
Thy part and ply me with thy sophist-skill?
No sun makes proof of his whole potency
For gold and purple in that orb we view:
The apparent orb does little but leave blind
The audacious, and confused the worshipping;
But, close on orb's departure, must succeed
The serviceable cloud,—must intervene,
Induce expenditure of rose and blue,
Reveal what lay in him was lost to us.
So, friends, what hinders, as we homeward go,
If, privileged by triumph gained to-day,
We clasp that cloud our sun left saturate,
The Rhodian rosy with Euripides?
Not of my audience on my triumph-day,
She nor her husband! After the night's news
Neither will sleep but watch; I know the mood.
Accompany! my crown declares my right!

And here you stand with those warm golden eyes!

"In honest language, I am scarce too sure
Whether I really felt, indeed expressed
Then, in that presence, things I now repeat:
Nor half, nor any one word,—will that do?
May be, such eyes must strike conviction, turn
One's nature bottom upwards, show the base—
The live rock latent under wave and foam:
Superimposure these! Yet solid stuff
Will ever and anon, obeying star,
(And what star reaches rock-nerve like an eye?)
Swim up to surface, spout or mud or flame,
And find no more to do than sink as fast.

"Anyhow, I have followed happily
The impulse, pledged my Genius with effect,
Since come to see you, I am shown—myself!"

I answered:

"One of us declared for both
'Welcome the glory of Aristophanes.'
The other adds: and,—if that glory last,
Nor marsh-born vapour creep to veil the same,—
Once entered, share in our solemnity!

Commemorate, as we, Euripides!"

"What?" he looked round, "I darken the bright house?
Profane the temple of your deity?
That 's true! Else wherefore does he stand portrayed?
What Rhodian paint and pencil saved so much,
Beard, freckled face, brow—all but breath, I hope!
Come, that 's unfair: myself am somebody,
Yet my pictorial fame 's just potter's-work,—
I merely figure on men's drinking-mugs!
I and the Flat-nose, Sophroniskos' son,
Oft make a pair. But what 's this lies below?
His table-book and graver, playwright's tool!
And lo, the sweet psalterion, strung and screwed,
Whereon he tried those *le-é-é-é-és*
And *ke-é-é-é-és* and turns and trills,
Lovely lark's tirra-lirra, lad's delight!
Aischulos' bronze-throat eagle-bark at blood
Has somehow spoiled my taste for twitterings!
With . . . what, and did he leave you 'Herakles'?
The 'Frenzied Hero,' one unfractured sheet,
No pine-wood tablets smeared with treacherous wax—
Papuros perfect as e'er tempted pen!
This sacred twist of bay-leaves dead and sere
Must be that crown the fine work failed to catch,—
No wonder! This might crown 'Antiope.'

'Herakles' triumph? In your heart perhaps!
But elsewhere? Come now, I 'll explain the case,
Show you the main mistake. Give me the sheet!"

I interrupted·

"Aristophanes!
The stranger-woman sues in her abode—
'Be honoured as our guest!' But, call it—shrine,
Then 'No dishonour to the Daimon!' bids
The priestess 'or expect dishonour's due!'
You enter fresh from your worst infamy,
Last instance of long outrage; yet I pause,
Withhold the word a-tremble on my lip,
Incline me, rather, yearn to reverence,—
So you but suffer that I see the blaze
And not the bolt,—the splendid fancy-fling,
Not the cold iron malice, the launched lie
Whence heavenly fire has withered; impotent,
Yet execrable, leave it 'neath the look
Of yon impassive presence! What he scorned,
His life long, need I touch, offend my foot,
To prove that malice missed its mark, that lie
Cumbers the ground, returns to whence it came?
I marvel, I deplore,—the rest be mute!
But, throw off hate's celestiality,—

Show me, apart from song flash and wit-flame,
A mere man's hand ignobly clenched against
Yon supreme calmness,—and I interpose,
Such as you see me! Silk breaks lightning's blow!"

He seemed to scarce so much as notice me,
Aught had I spoken, save the final phrase:
Arrested there.

"Euripides grown calm!
Calmness supreme means dead and therefore safe,"
He muttered; then more audibly began—

"Dead! Such must die! Could people comprehend!
There 's the unfairness of it! So obtuse
Are all: from Solon downward with his saw
'Let none revile the dead,—no, though the son,
Nay, far descendant, should revile thyself!'—
To him who made Elektra, in the act
Of wreaking vengeance on her worst of foes,
Scruple to blame, since speech that blames insults
Too much the very villain life-released.
Now, *I* say, only after death, begins
That formidable claim,—immunity
Of faultiness from fault's due punishment!
The living, who defame me,—why, they live:

Fools,—I best prove them foolish by their life,
Will they but work on, lay their work by mine,
And wait a little, one Olympiad, say!
Then—where 's the vital force, mine froze beside?
The sturdy fibre, shamed my brittle stuff?
The school-correctness, sure of wise award
When my vagaries cease to tickle taste?
Where 's censure that must sink me, judgment big
Awaiting just the word posterity
Pants to pronounce? Time's wave breaks, buries—*whom*,
Fools, when myself confronts you four years hence?
But die, ere next Lenaia,—safely so
You 'scape me, slink with all your ignorance,
Stupidity and malice, to that hole
O'er which survivors croak 'Respect the dead!'
Ay, for I needs must! But allow me clutch
Only a carrion-handful, lend it sense,
(Mine, not its own, or could it answer me?)
And question 'You, I pluck from hiding-place,
Whose cant was, certain years ago, my 'Clouds'
Might last until the swallows came with Spring—
Whose chatter, 'Birds' are unintelligible,
Mere psychologic puzzling: poetry?
List, the true lay to rock a cradle with!
O man of Mitulené, wondrous wise!'
—Would not I rub each face in its own filth

To tune of 'Now that years have come and gone,
How does the fact stand? What 's demonstrable
By time, that tries things?—your own test, not mine
Who think men are, were, ever will be fools,
Though somehow fools confute fools,—as these, you!
Don't mumble to the sheepish twos and threes
You cornered and called 'audience'! Face this *me*
Who know, and can, and—helped by fifty years—
Do pulverize you pygmies, then as now!'

"Ay, now as then, I pulverize the brood,
Balaustion! Mindful, from the first, where foe
Would hide head safe when hand had flung its stone,
I did not turn cheek and take pleasantry,
But flogged while skin could purple and flesh start,
To teach fools whom they tried conclusions with.
First face a-splutter at me got such splotch
Of prompt slab mud as, filling mouth to maw,
Made its concern thenceforward not so much
To criticize me as go cleanse itself.
The only drawback to which huge delight,—
(He saw it, how he saw it, that calm cold
Sagacity you call Euripides!)
—Why, 't is that, make a muckheap of a man,
There, pillared by your prowess, he remains,
Immortally immerded. Not so he!

Men pelted him but got no pellet back.
He reasoned, I 'll engage,—' Acquaint the world
Certain minuteness butted at my knee?
Dogface Eruxis, the small satirist,—
What better would the manikin desire
Than to strut forth on tiptoe, notable
As who, so far up, fouled me in the flank?'
So dealt he with the dwarfs: we giants, too,
Why must we emulate their pin-point play?
Render imperishable—impotence,
For mud throw mountains? Zeus, by mud unreached,—
Well, 't was no dwarf he heaved Olumpos at!"

My heart burned up within me to my tongue.

" And why must men remember, ages hence,
Who it was rolled down rocks, but refuse too—
Strattis might steal from! mixture-monument,
Recording what? 'I, Aristophanes,
Who boast me much inventive in my art,
Against Euripides thus volleyed muck
Because, in art, he too extended bounds.
I—patriot, loving peace and hating war,—
Choosing the rule of few, but wise and good,
Rather than mob-dictature, fools and knaves
However multiplied their mastery,—

Despising most of all the demagogue,
(Noisome air-bubble, buoyed up, borne along
By kindred breath of knave and fool below,
Whose hearts swell proudly as each puffing face
Grows big, reflected in that glassy ball,
Vacuity, just bellied out to break
And righteously bespatter friends the first)—
I loathing,—beyond less puissant speech
Than my own god-grand language to declare,—
The fawning, cozenage and calumny
Wherewith such favourite feeds the populace
That fan and set him flying for reward :—
I who, detecting what vice underlies
Thought's superstructure,—fancy's sludge and slime
'Twixt fact's sound floor and thought's mere surface-growth
Of hopes and fears which root no deeplier down
Than where all such mere fungi breed and bloat—
Namely, man's misconception of the God :—
I, loving, hating, wishful from my soul
That truth should triumph, falsehood have defeat,
—Why, all my soul's supremacy of power
Did I pour out in volley just on him
Who, his whole life long, championed every cause
I called my heart's cause, loving as I loved,
Hating my hates, spurned falsehood, championed truth,—
Championed truth not by flagellating foe

With simple rose and lily, gibe and jeer,
Sly wink of boon-companion o'er his bowze
Who, while he blames the liquor, smacks the lip,
Blames, doubtless, but leers condonation too,—
No, the balled fist broke brow like thunderbolt,
Battered till brain flew! Seeing which descent,
None questioned that was first acquaintanceship,
The avenger's with the vice he crashed through bone.
Still, he displeased me; and I turned from foe
To fellow-fighter, flung much stone, more mud,—
But missed him, since he lives aloof, I see.'
Pah! stop more shame, deep-cutting glory through,
Nor add, this poet, learned,—found no taunt
Tell like 'That other poet studies books!'
Wise,—cried 'At each attempt to move our hearts,
He uses the mere phrase of daily life!'
Witty,—'His mother was a herb-woman!'
Veracious, honest, loyal, fair and good,—
'It was Kephisophon who helped him write!'

"Whence,—O the tragic end of comedy!—
Balaustion pities Aristophanes.
For, who believed him? Those who laughed so loud?
They heard him call the sun Sicilian cheese!
Had he called true cheese—curd, would muscle move?
What made them laugh but the enormous lie?

'Kephisophon wrote Herakles? ha, ha,
What can have stirred the wine-dregs, soured the soul
And set a-lying Aristophanes?
Some accident at which he took offence!
The Tragic Master in a moody muse
Passed him unhailing, and it hurts—it hurts!
Beside, there 's licence for the Wine-lees-song!'"

Blood burnt the cheek-bone, each black eye flashed fierce.

"But this exceeds our licence! Stay awhile—
That 's the solution! both are foreigners,
The fresh-come Rhodian lady and her spouse
The man of Phokis: newly resident,
Nowise instructed—that explains it all!
No born and bred Athenian but would smile,
Unless frown seemed more fit for ignorance.
These strangers have a privilege!

"You blame"
(Presently he resumed with milder mien)
"Both theory and practice—Comedy:
Blame her from altitudes the Tragic friend
Rose to, and upraised friends along with him,
No matter how. Once there, all 's cold and fine,
Passionless, rational; our world beneath

Shows (should you condescend to grace so much
As glance at poor Athenai) grimly gross—
A population which, mere flesh and blood,
Eats, drinks and kisses, falls to fisticuffs,
Then hugs as hugely: speaks too as it acts,
Prodigiously talks nonsense,—townsmen needs
Must parley in their town's vernacular.
Such world has, of two courses, one to choose:
Unworld itself,—or else go blackening off
To its crow-kindred, leave philosophy
Her heights serene, fit perch for owls like you.
Now, since the world demurs to either course,
Permit me,—in default of boy or girl,
So they be reared Athenian, good and true,—
To praise what you most blame! Hear Art's defence!
I 'll prove our institution, Comedy,
Coëval with the birth of freedom, matched
So nice with our Republic, that its growth
Measures each greatness, just as its decline
Would signalize the downfall of the pair.
Our Art began when Bacchos . . . never mind!
You and your master don't acknowledge gods:
'They are not, no, they are not!' well,—began
When the rude instinct of our race outspoke,
Found,—on recurrence of festivity
Occasioned by black mother-earth's good will

To children, as they took her vintage-gifts,—
Found—not the least of many benefits—
That wine unlocked the stiffest lip, and loosed
The tongue late dry and reticent of joke,
Through custom's gripe which gladness thrusts aside.
So, emulating liberalities,
Heaven joined with earth for that god's day at least,
Renewed man's privilege, grown obsolete,
Of telling truth nor dreading punishment.
Whereon the joyous band disguised their forms
With skins, beast-fashion, daubed each phyz with dregs,
Then hollaed 'Neighbour, you are fool, you—knave,
You—hard to serve, you—stingy to reward!'
The guiltless crowed, the guilty sunk their crest,
And good folk gained thereby, 't was evident.
Whence, by degrees, a birth of happier thought,
The notion came—not simply this to say,
But this to do—prove, put in evidence,
And act the fool, the knave, the harsh, the hunks,
Who *did* prate, cheat, shake fist, draw pursestring tight,
As crowd might see, which only heard before.

"So played the Poet, with his man of parts;
And all the others, found unqualified
To mount cart and be persons, made the mob,
Joined choros, fortified their fellows' fun,

Anticipated the community,
Gave judgment which the public ratified.
Suiting rough weapon doubtless to plain truth,
They flung, for word-artillery, why—filth;
Still, folk who wiped the unsavoury salute
From visage, would prefer the mess to wit—
Steel, poked through midriff with a civil speech,
As now the way is: then, the kindlier mode
Was—drub not stab, ribroast not scarify!
So did Sousarion introduce, and so
Did I, acceding, find the Comic Art:
Club,—if I call it,—notice what 's implied!
An engine proper for rough chastisement,
No downright slaying: with impunity—
Provided crabtree, steeped in oily joke,
Deal only such a bruise as laughter cures.
I kept the gained advantage: stickled still
For club-law—stout fun and allowanced thumps:
Knocked in each knob a crevice to hold joke
As fig-leaf holds the fat-fry.

"Next, whom thrash?
Only the coarse fool and the clownish knave?
Higher, more artificial, composite
Offence should prove my prowess, eye and arm!
Not who robs henroost, tells of untaxed figs,

Spends all his substance on stewed ellops-fish,
Or gives a pheasant to his neighbour's wife:
No! strike malpractice that affects the State,
The common weal—intriguer or poltroon,
Venality, corruption, what care I
If shrewd or witless merely?—so the thing
Lay sap to aught that made Athenai bright
And happy, change her customs, lead astray
Youth or age, play the demagogue at Pnux,
The sophist in Palaistra, or—what 's worst,
As widest mischief,—from the Theatre
Preach innovation, bring contempt on oaths,
Adorn licentiousness, despise the Cult.
Are such to be my game? Why, then there wants
Quite other cunning than a cudgel-sweep!
Grasp the old stout stock, but new tip with steel
Each boss, if I would bray—no callous hide
Simply, but Lamachos in coat of proof,
Or Kleon cased about with impudence!
Shaft pushed no worse while point pierced sparkling so
That none smiled 'Sportive, what seems savagest,
—Innocuous anger, spiteless rustic mirth!'
Yet spiteless in a sort, considered well,
Since I pursued my warfare till each wound
Went through the mere man, reached the principle
Worth purging from Athenai. Lamachos?

No, I attacked war's representative;
Kleon? No, flattery of the populace;
Sokrates? No, but that pernicious seed
Of sophists whereby hopeful youth is taught
To jabber argument, chop logic, pore
On sun and moon, and worship Whirligig.
O your tragedian, with the lofty grace,
Aims at no other and effects as much?
Candidly: what 's a polished period worth,
Filed curt sententiousness of loaded line,
When he who deals out doctrine, primly steps
From just that selfsame moon he maunders of,
And, blood-thinned by his pallid nutriment,
Proposes to rich earth-blood—purity?
In me, 't was equal-balanced flesh rebuked
Excess alike in stuff-guts Glauketes
Or starveling Chairephon; I challenged both,—
Strong understander of our common life,
I urged sustainment of humanity.
Whereas when your tragedian cries up Peace—
He 's silent as to cheesecakes Peace may chew;
Seeing through rabble-rule, he shuts his eye
To what were better done than crowding Pnux—
That 's—dance '*Threttanelo*, the Kuklops drunk!

"My power has hardly need to vaunt itself!

Opposers peep and mutter, or speak plain:
'No naming names in Comedy!' votes one,
'Nor vilifying live folk!' legislates
Another, 'urge amendment on the dead!'
'Don't throw away hard cash,' supplies a third,
'But crib from actor's dresses, choros-treats!'
Then Kleon did his best to bully me:
Called me before the Law Court: 'Such a play
Satirized citizens with strangers there,
Such other,'—why, its fault was in myself!
I was, this time, the stranger, privileged
To act no play at all,—Egyptian, I—
Rhodian or Kameirensian, Aiginete,
Lindian, or any foreigner he liked—
Because I can't write Attic, probably!
Go ask my rivals,—how they roughed my fleece,
And how, shorn pink themselves, the huddled sheep
Shiver at distance from the snapping shears!
Why must they needs provoke me?

"All the same,
No matter for my triumph, I foretell
Subsidence of the day-star: quench his beams
No Aias e'er was equal to the feat
By throw of shield, tough-hided seven times seven,
'Twixt sky and earth! 't is dullards soft and sure

Who breathe against his brightest, here a sigh
And there a 'So let be, we pardon you!'
Till the minute mist hangs a block, has tamed
Noonblaze to 'twilight mild and equable,'
Vote the old women spinning out of doors.
Give me the earth-spasm, when the lion ramped
And the bull gendered in the brave gold flare!
O you shall have amusement,—better still,
Instruction! no more horse-play, naming names,
Taxing the fancy when plain sense will serve!
Thearion, now, my friend who bakes you bread,
What 's worthier limning than his household life?
His whims and ways, his quarrels with the spouse,
And how the son, instead of learning knead
Kilikian loaves, brings heart-break on his sire
By buying horseflesh branded *San*, each flank,
From shrewd Menippos who imports the ware:
While pretty daughter Kepphé too much haunts
The shop of Sporgilos the barber! brave!
Out with Thearion's meal-tub politics
In lieu of Pisthetairos, Strepsiades!
That 's your exchange? O Muse of Megara!
Advise the fools '*Feed babe on weasel-lap*
For wild-boar's marrow, Cheiron's hero-pap,
And rear, for man—Ariphrades, mayhap!'
Yes, my Balaustion, yes, my Euthukles,

That 's *your* exchange,—who, foreigners in fact
And fancy, would impose your squeamishness
On sturdy health, and substitute such brat
For the right offspring of us Rocky Ones,
Because babe kicks the cradle,—crows, not mewls!

" Which brings me to the prime fault, poison-speck
Whence all the plague springs—that first feud of all
'Twixt me and you and your Euripides.
' Unworld the world ' frowns he, my opposite.
I cry, ' Life ! ' ' Death,' he groans, ' our better Life ! '
Despise what is—the good and graspable,
Prefer the out of sight and in at mind,
To village-joy, the well-side violet-patch,
The jolly club-feast when our field 's in soak,
Roast thrushes, hare-soup, pea-soup, deep washed down
With Peparethian ; the prompt paying off
That black-eyed brown-skinned country-flavoured wench
We caught among our brushwood foraging :
On these look fig-juice, curdle up life's cream,
And fall to magnifying misery!
Or, if you condescend to happiness,
Why, talk, talk, talk about the empty name
While thing's self lies neglected 'neath your nose!
I need particular discourtesy
And private insult from Euripides

To render contest with him credible?
Say, all of me is outraged! one stretched sense,
I represent the whole Republic,—gods,
Heroes, priests, legislators, poets,—prone,
And pummelled into insignificance,
If will in him were matched with power of stroke.
For see what he has changed or hoped to change!
How few years since, when he began the fight,
Did there beat life indeed Athenai through!
Plenty and peace, then! Hellas thundersmote
The Persian. He himself had birth, you say,
That morn salvation broke at Salamis,
And heroes still walked earth. Themistokles—
Surely his mere back-stretch of hand could still
Find, not so lost in dark, Odusseus?—he
Holding as surely on to Herakles,—
Who touched Zeus, link by link, the unruptured chain!
Were poets absent? Aischulos might hail—
With Pindaros, Theognis,—whom for sire?
Homeros' self, departed yesterday!
While Hellas, saved and sung to, then and thus,—
Ah, people,—ah, lost antique liberty!
We lived, ourselves, undoubted lords of earth:
Wherever olives flourish, corn yields crop
To constitute our title—ours such land!
Outside of oil and breadstuff,—barbarism!

What need of conquest? Let barbarians starve!
Devote our whole strength to our sole defence,
Content with peerless native products, home,
Beauty profuse in earth's mere sights and sounds,
Such men, such women, and such gods their guard!
The gods? he worshipped best who feared them most,
And left their nature uninquired into,
—Nature? their very names! pay reverence,
Do sacrifice for our part, theirs would be
To prove benignantest of playfellows.
With kindly humanism they countenanced
Our emulation of divine escapes
Through sense and soul: soul, sense are made to use;
Use each, acknowledging its god the while!
Crush grape, dance, drink, indulge, for Bacchos' sake!
'T is Aphrodité's feast-day—frisk and fling,
Provided we observe our oaths, and house
Duly the stranger: Zeus takes umbrage else!
Ah, the great time—had I been there to taste!
Perikles, right Olumpian,—occupied
As yet with getting an Olumpos reared
Marble and gold above Akropolis,—
Wisely so spends what thrifty fools amassed
For cut-throat projects. Who carves Promachos?
Who writes the Oresteia?

"Ah, the time!
For, all at once, a cloud has blanched the blue,
A cold wind creeps through the close vineyard-rank,
The olive-leaves curl, violets crisp and close
Like a nymph's wrinkling at the bath's first splash
On breast. (Your pardon!) There 's a restless change,
Deterioration. Larks and nightingales
Are silenced, here and there a gor-crow grim
Flaps past, as scenting opportunity.
Where Kimon passaged to the Boulé once,
A starveling crew, unkempt, unshorn, unwashed,
Occupy altar-base and temple-step,
Are minded to indoctrinate our youth!
How call these carrion kill-joys that intrude?
'Wise men,' their nomenclature! Prodikos—
Who scarce could, unassisted, pick his steps
From way Theseia to the Tripods' way,—
This empty noddle comprehends the sun,—
How he 's Aigina's bigness, wheels no whit
His way from east to west, nor wants a steed!
And here 's Protagoras sets wrongheads right,
Explains what virtue, vice, truth, falsehood mean,
Makes all we seemed to know prove ignorance
Yet knowledge also, since, on either side
Of any question, something is to say,
Nothing to 'stablish, all things to disturb!

And shall youth go and play at kottabos,
Leaving unsettled whether moon-spots breed?
Or dare keep Choes ere the problem 's solved—
Why should I like my wife who dislikes me?
'But sure the gods permit this, censure that?'
So tell them! straight the answer 's in your teeth:
'You relegate these points, then, to the gods?
What and where are they?' What my sire supposed,
And where yon cloud conceals them! 'Till they 'scape
And scramble down to Leda, as a swan,
Europa, as a bull! why not as—ass
To somebody? Your sire was Zeus perhaps!
Either—away with such ineptitude!
Or, wanting energy to break your bonds,
Stick to the good old stories, think the rain
Is—Zeus distilling pickle through a sieve!
Think thunder 's thrown to break Theoros' head
For breaking oaths first! Meanwhile let ourselves
Instruct your progeny you prate like fools
Of father Zeus, who 's but the atmosphere,
Brother Poseidon, otherwise called -sea,
And son Hephaistos—fire and nothing else!
Over which nothings there 's a something still,
"Necessity," that rules the universe
And cares as much about your Choes-feast
Performed or intermitted, as you care

Whether gnats sound their trump from head or tail!'
When, stupefied at such philosophy,
We cry—Arrest the madmen, governor!
Pound hemlock and pour bull's-blood, Perikles!—
Would you believe? The Olumpian bends his brow,
Scarce pauses from his building! 'Say they thus?
Then, they say wisely. Anaxagoras,
I had not known how simple proves eclipse
But for thy teaching! Go, fools, learn like me!'

"Well, Zeus nods: man must reconcile himself,
So, let the Charon's-company harangue,
And Anaxagoras be—as we wish!
A comfort is in nature: while grass grows
And water runs, and sesame pricks tongue,
And honey from Brilesian hollow melts
On mouth, and Bacchis' flavorous lip beats both,
You will not be untaught life's use, young man?
Pho! My young man just proves that panniered ass
Said to have borne Youth strapped on his stout back,
With whom a serpent bargained, bade him swap
The priceless boon for—water to quench thirst!
What 's youth to my young man? In love with age,
He Spartanizes, argues, fasts and frowns,
Denies the plainest rules of life, long since
Proved sound; sets all authority aside,

Must simply recommence things, learn ere act,
And think out thoroughly how youth should pass—
Just as if youth stops passing, all the same!

"One last resource is left us—poetry!
Vindicate nature, prove Plataian help,
Turn out, a thousand strong, all right and tight,
To save Sense, poet! Bang the sophist-brood
Would cheat man out of wholesome sustenance
By swearing wine is water, honey—gall,
Saperdion—the Empousa! Panic-smit,
Our juveniles abstain from Sense and starve:
Be yours to disenchant them! Change things back!
Or better, strain a point the other way
And handsomely exaggerate wronged truth!
Lend wine a glory never gained from grape,
Help honey with a snatch of him we style
The Muses' Bee, bay-bloom-fed Sophokles,
And give Saperdion a Kimberic robe!

"'I, his successor,' gruff the answer grunts,
'Incline to poetize philosophy,
Extend it rather than restrain; as thus—
Are heroes men? No more, and scarce as much,
Shall mine be represented. Are men poor?
Behold them ragged, sick, lame, halt and blind!

Do they use speech? Ay, street-terms, market-phrase!
Having thus drawn sky earthwards, what comes next
But dare the opposite, lift earth to sky?
Mere puppets once, I now make womankind,
For thinking, saying, doing, match the male.
Lift earth? I drop to, dally with, earth's dung!
—Recognize in the very slave—man's mate,
Declare him brave and honest, kind and true,
And reasonable as his lord, in brief.
I paint men as they are—so runs my boast—
Not as they should be: paint—what 's part of man
—Women and slaves—not as, to please your pride,
They should be, but your equals, as they are.
O and the Gods! Instead of abject mien,
Submissive whisper, while my Choros cants
'Zeus,—with thy cubit's length of attributes,—
May I, the ephemeral, ne'er scrutinize
Who made the heaven and earth and all things there!'
Myself shall say' . . . Ay, Herakles may help!
Give me,—I want the very words,—attend!"

He read. Then "Murder 's out,—'There are no Gods
Man has no master, owns, by consequence,
No right, no wrong, except to please or plague
His nature: what man likes be man's sole law!
Still, since he likes Saperdion, honey, figs,

Man may reach freedom by your roundabout.
'Never believe yourselves the freer thence!
There are no gods, but there 's "Necessity,"—
Duty enjoined you, fact in figment's place,
Throned on no mountain, native to the mind!
Therefore deny yourselves Saperdion, figs
And honey, for the sake of—what I dream,
A-sitting with my legs up!'

"Infamy!
The poet casts in calm his lot with these
Assailants of Apollon! Sworn to serve
Each Grace, the Furies call him minister—
He, who was born for just that roseate world
Renounced so madly, where what 's false is fact,
Where he makes beauty out of ugliness,
Where he lives, life itself disguised for him
As immortality—so works the spell,
The enthusiastic mood which marks a man
Muse-mad, dream-drunken, wrapt around by verse,
Encircled with poetic atmosphere,
As lark emballed by its own crystal song,
Or rose enmisted by that scent it makes!
No, this were unreality! the real
He wants, not falsehood,—truth alone he seeks,
Truth, for all beauty! Beauty, in all truth—

That 's certain somehow ! Must the eagle lilt
Lark-like, needs fir-tree blossom rose-like? No !
Strength and utility charm more than grace,
And what 's most ugly proves most beautiful.
So much assistance from Euripides !

"Whereupon I betake me, since needs must,
To a concluding—'Go and feed the crows !
Do ! Spoil your art as you renounce your life,
Poetize your so precious system, do,
Degrade the hero, nullify the god,
Exhibit women, slaves and men as peers,—
Your castigation follows prompt enough !
When all 's concocted upstairs, heels o'er head,
Down must submissive drop the masterpiece
For public praise or blame : so, praise away,
Friend Socrates, wife's-friend Kephisophon !
Boast innovations, cramp phrase, uncouth song,
Hard matter and harsh manner, gods, men, slaves
And women jumbled to a laughing-stock
Which Hellas shall hold sides at lest she split !
Hellas, on these, shall have her word to say !

"She has it and she says it—there 's the curse !—
She finds he makes the shag-rag hero-race,
The noble slaves, wise women, move as much

Pity and terror as true tragic types:
Applauds inventiveness—the plot so new,
The turn and trick subsidiary so strange!
She relishes that homely phrase of life,
That common town-talk, more than trumpet-blasts:
Accords him right to chop and change a myth:
What better right had he, who told the tale
In the first instance, to embellish fact?
This last may disembellish yet improve!
Both find a block: this man carves back to bull
What first his predecessor cut to sphynx:
Such genuine actual roarer, nature's brute,
Intelligible to our time, was sure
The old-world artist's purpose, had he worked
To mind; this both means and makes the thing!
If, past dispute, the verse slips oily-bathed
In unctuous music—say, effeminate—
We also say, like Kuthereia's self,
A lulling effluence which enswathes some isle
Where hides a nymph, not seen but felt the more.
That 's Hellas' verdict!

"Does Euripides
Even so far absolved, remain content?
Nowise! His task is to refine, refine,
Divide, distinguish, subtilize away

Whatever seemed a solid planting-place
For foot-fall,—not in that phantasmal sphere
Proper to poet, but on vulgar earth
Where people used to tread with confidence.
There 's left no longer one plain positive
Enunciation incontestable
Of what is good, right, decent here on earth.
Nobody now can say 'this plot is mine,
Though but a plethron square,—my duty!'—
'Yours?
Mine, or at least not yours,' snaps somebody!
And, whether the dispute be parent-right
Or children's service, husband's privilege
Or wife's submission, there 's a snarling straight,
Smart passage of opposing 'yea' and 'nay,'
'Should,' 'should not,' till, howe'er the contest end,
Spectators go off sighing—Clever thrust!
Why was I so much hurried to pay debt,
Attend my mother, sacrifice an ox,
And set my name down 'for a trireme, good'?
Something I might have urged on t' other side!
No doubt, Chresphontes or Bellerophon
We don't meet every day; but Stab-and-stitch
The tailor—ere I turn the drachmas o'er
I owe him for a chiton, as he thinks,
I 'll pose the blockhead with an argument!

"So has he triumphed, your Euripides!
Oh, I concede, he rarely gained a prize:
That 's quite another matter! cause for that!
Still, when 't was got by Ions, Iophons,
Off he would pace confoundedly superb,
Supreme, no smile at movement on his mouth
Till Sokrates winked, whispered: out it broke!
And Aristullos jotted down the jest,
While Iophons or Ions, bay on brow,
Looked queerly, and the foreigners—like you—
Asked o'er the border with a puzzled smile
—'And so, you value Ions, Iophons,
Euphorions! How about Euripides?'
(Eh, brave bard's-champion? Does the anger boil?
Keep within bounds a moment,—eye and lip
Shall loose their doom on me, their fiery worst!)
What strangers? Archelaos heads the file!
He sympathizes, he concerns himself,
He pens epistle, each successless play:
'Athenai sinks effete; there 's younger blood
In Makedonia. Visit where I rule!
Do honour to me and take gratitude!
Live the guest's life, or work the poet's way,
Which also means the statesman's: he who wrote
Erechtheus may seem rawly politic
At home where Kleophon is ripe; but here

My council-board permits him choice of seats.'

"Now this was operating,—what should prove
A poison-tree, had flowered far on to fruit
For many a year,—when I was moved, first man,
To dare the adventure, down with root and branch.
So, from its sheath I drew my Comic steel,
And dared what I am now to justify.
A serious question first, though!

"Once again!
Do you believe, when I aspired in youth,
I made no estimate of power at all,
Nor paused long, nor considered much, what class
Of fighters I might claim to join, beside
That class wherewith I cast in company?
Say, you—profuse of praise no less than blame—
Could not I have competed—franker phrase
Might trulier correspond to meaning—still,
Competed with your Tragic paragon?
Suppose me minded simply to make verse,
To fabricate, parade resplendent arms,
Flourish and sparkle out a Trilogy,—
Where was the hindrance? But my soul bade 'Fight!
Leave flourishing for mock-foe, pleasure-time;
Prove arms efficient on real heads and hearts!'

How? With degeneracy sapping fast
The Marathonian muscle, nerved of old
To maul the Mede, now strung at best to help
—How did I fable?—War and Hubbub mash
To mincemeat Fatherland and Brotherhood,
Pound in their mortar Hellas, State by State,
That greed might gorge, the while frivolity
Rubbed hands and smacked lips o'er the dainty dish!
Authority, experience—pushed aside
By any upstart who pleads throng and press
O' the people! 'Think, say, do thus!' Wherefore, pray?
'We are the people: who impugns our right
Of choosing Kleon that tans hide so well,
Huperbolos that turns out lamps so trim,
Hemp-seller Eukrates or Lusikles
Sheep-dealer, Kephalos the potter's son,
Diitriphes who weaves the willow-work
To go round bottles, and Nausikudes
The meal-man? Such we choose and more, their mates,
To think and say and do in our behalf!'
While sophistry wagged tongue, emboldened still,
Found matter to propose, contest, defend,
'Stablish, turn topsyturvy,—all the same,
No matter what, provided the result
Were something new in place of something old,—
Set wagging by pure insolence of soul

Which needs must pry into, have warrant for
Each right, each privilege good policy
Protects from curious eye and prating mouth!
Everywhere lust to shape the world anew,
Spurn this Athenai as we find her, build
A new impossible Cloudcuckooburg
For feather-headed birds, once solid men,
Where rules, discarding jolly habitude,
Nourished on myrtle-berries and stray ants,
King Tereus who, turned Hoopoe Triple-Crest,
Shall terrify and bring the gods to terms!

"Where was I? Oh! Things ailing thus—I ask,
What cure? Cut, thrust, hack, hew at heap-on-heaped
Abomination with the exquisite
Palaistra-tool of polished Tragedy?
Erechtheus shall harangue Amphiktuon,
And incidentally drop word of weight
On justice, righteousness, so turn aside
The audience from attacking Sicily!—
The more that Choros, after he recounts
How Phrixos rode the ram, the far-famed Fleece,
Shall add—at last fall of grave dancing-foot—
'Aggression never yet was helped by Zeus!'
That helps or hinders Alkibiades?
As well expect, should Pheidias carve Zeus' self

And set him up, some half a mile away,
His frown would frighten sparrows from your field!
Eagles may recognize their lord, belike,
But as for vulgar sparrows,—change the god,
And plant some big Priapos with a pole!
I wield the Comic weapon rather—hate!
Hate! honest, earnest and directest hate—
Warfare wherein I close with enemy,
Call him one name and fifty epithets,
Remind you his great-grandfather sold bran,
Describe the new exomion, sleeveless coat
He knocked me down last night and robbed me of,
Protest he voted for a tax on air!
And all this hate—if I write Comedy—
Finds tolerance, most like—applause, perhaps
True veneration; for I praise the god
Present in person of his minister,
And pay—the wilder my extravagance—
The more appropriate worship to the Power
Adulterous, night-roaming, and the rest:
Otherwise,—that originative force
Of nature, impulse stirring death to life,
Which, underlying law, seems lawlessness,
Yet is the outbreak which, ere order be,
Must thrill creation through, warm stocks and stones,
Phales Iacchos.

"Comedy for me!
Why not for you, my Tragic masters? Sneaks
Whose art is mere desertion of a trust!
Such weapons lay to hand, the ready club,
The clay-ball, on the ground a stone to snatch,—
Arms fit to bruise the boar's neck, break the chine
O' the wolf,—and you must impiously—despise?
No, I 'll say, furtively let fall that trust
Consigned you! 'T was not 'take or leave alone,'
But 'take and, wielding, recognize your god
In his prime attributes!' And though full soon
You sneaked, subsided into poetry,
Nor met your due reward, still,—heroize
And speechify and sing-song and forego
Far as you may your function,—still its pact
Endures, one piece of early homage still
Exacted of you; after your three bouts
At hoitytoity, great men with long words,
And so forth,—at the end, must tack itself
The genuine sample, the Satyric Play,
Concession, with its wood-boys' fun and freak,
To the true taste of the mere multitude.
Yet, there again! What does your Still-at-itch,
Always-the-innovator? Shrugs and shirks!
Out of his fifty Trilogies, some five
Are somehow suited: Satyrs dance and sing,

Try merriment, a grimly prank or two,
Sour joke squeezed through pursed lips and teeth on edge,
Then quick on top of toe to pastoral sport,
Goat-tending and sheep-herding, cheese and cream,
Soft grass and silver rillets, country-fare—
When throats were promised Thasian! Five such feats,
Then frankly off he threw the yoke: next Droll,
Next festive drama, covenanted fun,
Decent reversion to indecency,
Proved—your 'Alkestis'! There 's quite fun enough,
Herakles drunk! From out fate's blackening wave
Calamitous, just zigzags some shot star,
Poor promise of faint joy, and turns the laugh
On dupes whose fears and tears were all in waste!

"For which sufficient reasons, in truth's name,
I closed with whom you count the Meaner Muse,
Classed me with Comic Poets who should weld
Dark with bright metal, show their blade may keep
Its adamantine birthright though a-blaze
With poetry, the gold, and wit, the gem,
And strike mere gold, unstiffened out by steel,
Or gem, no iron joints its strength around,
From hand of—posturer, not combatant!

"Such was my purpose: it succeeds, I say!

Have not we beaten Kallikratidas,
Not humbled Sparté? Peace awaits our word,
Spite of Theramenes, and fools his like.
Since my previsions,—warranted too well
By the long war now waged and worn to end—
Had spared such heritage of misery,
My after-counsels scarce need fear repulse.
Athenai, taught prosperity has wings,
Cages the glad recapture. Demos, see,
From folly's premature decrepitude
Boiled young again, emerges from the stew
Of twenty-five years' trouble, sits and sways,
One brilliance and one balsam,—sways and sits
Monarch of Hellas! ay and, sage again,
No longer jeopardizes chieftainship,
No longer loves the brutish demagogue
Appointed by a bestial multitude
But seeks out sound advisers. Who are they?
Ourselves, of parentage proved wise and good!
To such may hap strains thwarting quality,
(As where shall want its flaw mere human stuff?)
Still, the right grain is proper to right race;
What 's contrary, call curious accident!
Hold by the usual! Orchard-grafted tree,
Not wilding, race-horse-sired, not rouncey-born,
Aristocrat, no sausage-selling snob!

Nay, why not Alkibiades, come back
Filled by the Genius, freed of petulance,
Frailty,—mere youthfulness that 's all at fault,—
Advanced to Perikles and something more?
—Being at least our duly born and bred,—
Curse on what chaunoprockt first gained his ear
And got his . . . well, once true man in right place,
Our commonalty soon content themselves
With doing just what they are born to do,
Eat, drink, make merry, mind their own affairs
And leave state-business to the larger brain.
I do not stickle for their punishment;
But certain culprits have a cloak to twitch,
A purse to pay the piper: flog, say I,
Your fine fantastics, paragons of parts,
Who choose to play the important! Far from side
With us, their natural supports, allies,—
And, best by brain, help who are best by birth
To fortify each weak point in the wall
Built broad and wide and deep for permanence
Between what 's high and low, what 's rare and vile,—
They cast their lot perversely in with low
And vile, lay flat the barrier, lift the mob
To dizzy heights where Privilege stood firm.
And then, simplicity become conceit,—
Woman, slave, common soldier, artisan,

Crazy with new-found worth, new-fangled claims,—
These must be taught next how to use their heads
And hands in driving man's right to mob's rule!
What fellows thus inflame the multitude?
Your Sokrates, still crying 'Understand!'
Your Aristullos,—'Argue!' Last and worst,
Should, by good fortune, mob still hesitate,
Remember there 's degree in heaven and earth,
Cry 'Aischulos enjoined us fear the gods,
And Sophokles advised respect the kings!'
Why, your Euripides informs them—'Gods?
They are not! Kings? They are, but . . . do not I,
In Suppliants, make my Theseus,—yours, no more,—
Fire up at insult of who styles him King?
Play off that Herald, I despise the most,
As patronizing kings' prerogative
Against a Theseus proud to dare no step
Till he consult the people?'

"Such as these—
Ah, you expect I am for strangling straight?
Nowise, Balaustion! All my roundabout
Ends at beginning, with my own defence.
I dose each culprit just with—Comedy.
Let each be doctored in exact the mode
Himself prescribes: by words, the word-monger—

My words to his words,—my lies, if you like,
To his lies. Sokrates I nickname thief,
Quack, necromancer; Aristullos,—say,
Male Kirké who bewitches and bewrays
And changes folk to swine; Euripides,—
Well, I acknowledge! Every word is false,
Looked close at; but stand distant and stare through,
All 's absolute indubitable truth
Behind lies, truth which only lies declare!
For come, concede me truth 's in thing not word,
Meaning not manner! Love smiles 'rogue' and 'wretch'
When 'sweet' and 'dear' seem vapid: Hate adopts
Love's 'sweet' and 'dear' when 'rogue' and 'wretch'
fall flat:
Love, Hate—are truths, then, each, in sense not sound.
Further: if Love, remaining Love, fell back
On 'sweet' and 'dear,'—if Hate, though Hate the same,
Dropped down to 'rogue' and 'wretch,'—each phrase
were false.
Good! and now grant I hate no matter whom
With reason: I must therefore fight my foe,
Finish the mischief which made enmity.
How? By employing means to most hurt him
Who much harmed me. What way did he do harm?
Through word or deed? Through word? with word,
wage war!

Word with myself directly? As direct
Reply shall follow: word to you, the wise,
Whence indirectly came the harm to me?
What wisdom I can muster waits on such.
Word to the populace which, misconceived
By ignorance and incapacity,
Ends in no such effect as follows cause
When I, or you the wise, are reasoned with,
So damages what I and you hold dear?
In that event, I ply the populace
With just such word as leavens their whole lump
To the right ferment for my purpose. *They*
Arbitrate properly between us both?
They weigh my answer with his argument,
Match quip with quibble, wit with eloquence?
All they attain to understand is—blank!
Two adversaries differ: which is right
And which is wrong, none takes on him to say,
Since both are unintelligible. Pooh!
Swear my foe's mother vended herbs she stole,
They fall a-laughing! Add,—his household drudge
Of all-work justifies that office well,
Kisses the wife, composing him the play,—
They grin at whom they gaped in wonderment,
And go off—'Was he such a sorry scrub?
This other seems to know! we praised too fast!'

Why then, my lies have done the work of truth,
Since 'scrub,' improper designation, means
Exactly what the proper argument
—Had such been comprehensible—proposed
To proper audience—were I graced with such—
Would properly result in; so your friend
Gets an impartial verdict on his verse
'The tongue swears, but the soul remains unsworn!

"There, my Balaustion! All is summed and said.
No other cause of quarrel with yourself!
Euripides and Aristophanes
Differ: he needs must round our difference
Into the mob's ear; with the mob I plead.
You angrily start forward 'This to me?'
No speck of this on you the thrice refined!
Could parley be restricted to us two,
My first of duties were to clear up doubt
As to our true divergence each from each.
Does my opinion so diverge from yours?
Probably less than little—not at all!
To know a matter, for my very self
And intimates—that 's one thing; to imply
By 'knowledge'—loosing whatsoe'er I know
Among the vulgar who, by mere mistake,
May brain themselves and me in consequence,—

That 's quite another. 'O the daring flight!
This only bard maintains the exalted brow,
Nor grovels in the slime nor fears the gods!'
Did *I* fear—*I* play superstitious fool,
Who, with the due proviso, introduced,
Active and passive, their whole company
As creatures too absurd for scorn itself?
Zeus? I have styled him—'slave, mere thrashing-block!'
I 'll tell you: in my very next of plays,
At Bacchos' feast, in Bacchos' honour, full
In front of Bacchos' representative,
I mean to make main-actor—Bacchos' self!
Forth shall he strut, apparent, first to last,
A blockhead, coward, braggart, liar, thief,
Demonstrated all these by his own mere
Xanthias the man-slave: such man shows such god
Shamed to brute-beastship by comparison!
And when ears have their fill of his abuse,
And eyes are sated with his pummelling,—
My Choros taking care, by, all the while,
Singing his glory, that men recognize
A god in the abused and pummelled beast,—
Then, should one ear be stopped of auditor,
Should one spectator shut revolted eye,—
Why, the Priest's self will first raise outraged voice

'Back, thou barbarian, thou ineptitude!
Does not most license hallow best our day,
And least decorum prove its strictest rite?
Since Bacchos bids his followers play the fool,
And there's no fooling like a majesty
Mocked at,—who mocks the god, obeys the law—
Law which, impute but indiscretion to,
And . . . why, the spirit of Euripides
Is evidently active in the world!'
Do I stop here? No! feat of flightier force!
See Hermes! what commotion raged,—reflect!—
When imaged god alone got injury
By drunkards' frolic! How Athenai stared
Aghast, then fell to frenzy, fit on fit,—
Ever the last the longest! At this hour,
The craze abates a little; so, my Play
Shall have up Hermes: and a Karion, slave,
(Since there's no getting lower) calls our friend
The profitable god, we honour so,
Whatever contumely fouls the mouth—
Bids him go earn more honest livelihood
By washing tripe in well-trough—wash he does,
Duly obedient! Have I dared my best?
Asklepios, answer!—deity in vogue,
Who visits Sophokles familiarly,
If you believe the old man,—at his age,

Living is dreaming, and strange guests haunt door
Of house, belike, peep through and tap at times
When a friend yawns there, waiting to be fetched,—
At any rate, to memorize the fact,
He has spent money, set an altar up
In the god's temple, now in much repute.
That temple-service trust me to describe—
Cheaters and choused, the god, his brace of girls,
Their snake, and how they manage to snap gifts
'And consecrate the same into a bag,'
For whimsies done away with in the dark!
As if, a stone's throw from that theatre
Whereon I thus unmask their dupery,
The thing were not religious and august!

"Of Sophokles himself—nor word nor sign
Beyond a harmless parody or so!
He founds no anti-school, upsets no faith,
But, living, lets live, the good easy soul
Who,—if he saves his cash, unpoetlike,
Loves wine and—never mind what other sport,
Boasts for his father just a sword-blade-smith,
Proves but queer captain when the people claim,
For one who conquered with 'Antigone,'
The right to undertake a squadron's charge,—
And needs the son's help now to finish plays,

Seeing his dotage calls for governance
And Iophon to share his property,—
Why, of all this, reported true, I breathe
Not one word—true or false, I like the man.
Sophokles lives and lets live: long live he!
Otherwise,—sharp the scourge and hard the blow!

"And what 's my teaching but—accept the old,
Contest the strange! acknowledge work that 's done,
Misdoubt men who have still their work to do!
Religions, laws and customs, poetries,
Are old? So much achieved victorious truth!
Each work was product of a life-time, wrung
From each man by an adverse world: for why?
He worked, destroying other older work
Which the world loved and so was loth to lose.
Whom the world beat in battle—dust and ash!
Who beat the world, left work in evidence,
And wears its crown till new men live new lives,
And fight new fights, and triumph in their turn.
I mean to show you on the stage: you 'll see
My Just Judge only venture to decide
Between two suitors, which is god, which man,
By thrashing both of them as flesh can bear.
You shall agree,—whichever bellows first,
He 's human; who holds longest out, divine:

That is the only equitable test.
Cruelty? Pray, who pricked them on to court
My thong's award? Must they needs dominate?
Then I—rebel. Their instinct grasps the new?
Mine bids retain the old: a fight must be,
And which is stronger the event will show.
O but the pain! Your proved divinity
Still smarts all reddened? And the rightlier served!
Was not some man's-flesh in him, after all?
Do let us lack no frank acknowledgment
There's nature common to both gods and men!
All of them—spirit? What so winced was clay.
Away pretence to some exclusive sphere
Cloud-nourishing a sole selected few
Fume-fed with self-superiority!
I stand up for the common coarse-as-clay
Existence,—stamp and ramp with heel and hoof
On solid vulgar life, you fools disown.
Make haste from your unreal eminence,
And measure lengths with me upon that ground
Whence this mud-pellet sings and summons you!
I know the soul, too, how the spark ascends
And how it drops apace and dies away.
I am your poet-peer, man thrice your match.
I too can lead an airy life when dead,
Fly like Kinesias when I 'm cloudward bound;

But here, no death shall mix with life it mars.

"So, my old enemy who caused the fight,
Own I have beaten you, Euripides!
Or,—if your advocate would contravene,—
Help him, Balaustion! Use the rosy strength!
I have not done my utmost,—treated you
As I might Aristullos, mint-perfumed,—
Still, let the whole rage burst in brave attack!
Don't pay the poor ambiguous compliment
Of fearing any pearl-white knuckled fist
Will damage this broad buttress of a brow!
Fancy yourself my Aristonumos,
Ameipsias or Sannurion: punch and pound!
Three cuckoos who cry 'cuckoo'! much I care!
They boil a stone! *Neblaretai! Rattei!*"

Cannot your task have end here, Euthukles?
Day by day glides our galley on its path:
Still sunrise and still sunset, Rhodes half-reached,
And still, my patient scribe! no sunset's peace
Descends more punctual than that brow's incline
O'er tablets which your serviceable hand
Prepares to trace. Why treasure up, forsooth,
These relics of a night that make me rich,

But, half-remembered merely, leave so poor
Each stranger to Athenai and her past?
For—how remembered! As some greedy hind
Persuades a honeycomb, beyond the due,
To yield its hoarding,—heedless what alloy
Of the poor bee's own substance taints the gold
Which, unforced, yields few drops, but purity,—
So would you fain relieve of load this brain,
Though the hived thoughts must bring away, with strength,
What words and weakness, strength's receptacle—
Wax from the store! Yet,—aching soothed away,—
Accept the compound! No suspected scent
But proves some rose was rifled, though its ghost
Scarce lingers with what promised musk and myrrh.
No need of farther squeezing. What remains
Can only be Balaustion, just her speech.

Ah, but—because speech serves a purpose still!—

He ended with that flourish. I replied,

Fancy myself your Aristonumos?
Advise me, rather, to remain myself,
Balaustion,—mindful what mere mouse confronts
The forest-monarch Aristophanes!

I who, a woman, claim no quality
Beside the love of all things loveable
Created by a power pre-eminent
In knowledge, as in love I stand perchance,
—You, the consummately-creative! How
Should I, then, dare deny submissive trust
To any process aiming at result
Such as you say your songs are pregnant with?
Result, all judge: means, let none scrutinize
Save those aware how glory best is gained
By daring means to end, ashamed of shame,
Constant in faith that only good works good,
While evil yields no fruit but impotence!
Graced with such plain good, I accept the means.
Nay, if result itself in turn become
Means,—who shall say?—to ends still loftier yet,—
Though still the good prove hard to understand,
The bad still seemingly predominate,—
Never may I forget which order bears
The burden, toils to win the great reward,
And finds, in failure, the grave punishment,
So, meantime, claims of me a faith I yield!
Moreover, a mere woman, I recoil
From what may prove man's-work permissible,
Imperative. Rough strokes surprise: what then?
Some lusty armsweep needs must cause the crash

Of thorn and bramble, ere those shrubs, those flowers.
We fain would have earth yield exclusively,
Are sown, matured and garlanded for boys
And girls, who know not how the growth was gained.
Finally, am I not a foreigner?
No born and bred Athenian,—isled about,
I scarce can drink, like you, at every breath,
Just some particular doctrine which may best
Explain the strange thing I revolt against—
How—by involvement, who may extricate?—
Religion perks up through impiety,
Law leers with licence, folly wise-like frowns,
The seemly lurks inside the abominable.
But opposites,—each neutralizes each
Haply by mixture: what should promise death,
May haply give the good ingredient force,
Disperse in fume the antagonistic ill.
This institution, therefore,—Comedy,—
By origin, a rite,—by exercise,
Proved an achievement tasking poet's power
To utmost, eking legislation out
Beyond the legislator's faculty,
Playing the censor where the moralist
Declines his function, far too dignified
For dealing with minute absurdities:
By efficacy,—virtue's guard, the scourge

Of vice, each folly's fly-flap, arm in aid
Of all that 's righteous, customary, sound
And wholesome; sanctioned therefore,—better say,
Prescribed for fit acceptance of this age
By, not alone the long recorded roll
Of earlier triumphs but, success to-day—
(The multitude as prompt recipient still
Of good gay teaching from that monitor
They crowned this morning—Aristophanes—
As when Sousarion's car first traversed street)
This product of Athenai—*I* dispute,
Impugn? There 's just one only circumstance
Explains that! I, poor critic, see, hear, feel;
But eyes, ears, senses prove me—foreigner!
Who shall gainsay that the raw new-come guest
Blames oft, too sensitive? On every side
Of—larger than your stage—life's spectacle,
Convention here permits and there forbids
Impulse and action, nor alleges more
Than some mysterious "So do all, and so
Does no one:" which the hasty stranger blames
Because, who bends the head unquestioning,
Transgresses, turns to wrong what else were right,
By failure of a reference to law
Beyond convention; blames unjustly, too—
As if, through that defect, all gained were lost

And slave-brand set on brow indelibly ;—
Blames unobservant or experienceless
That men, like trees, if stout and sound and sane,
Show stem no more affected at the root
By bough's exceptional submissive dip
Of leaf and bell, light danced at end of spray
To windy fitfulness in wayward sport—
No more lie prostrate—than low files of flower
Which, when the blast goes by, unruffled raise
Each head again o'er ruder meadow-wreck
Of thorn and thistle that refractory
Demurred to cower at passing wind's caprice.
Why shall not guest extend like charity,
Conceive how,—even when astounded most
That natives seem to acquiesce in muck
Changed by prescription, they affirm, to gold,—
Such may still bring to test, still bear away
Safely and surely much of good and true
Though latent ore, themselves unspecked, unspoiled?
Fresh bathed i' the icebrook, any hand may pass
A placid moment through the lamp's fierce flame :
And who has read your Lemnians seen The Hours,
Heard Female-Playhouse-seat-Preoccupants,
May feel no worse effect than, once a year,
Those who leave decent vesture, dress in rags
And play the mendicant, conform thereby

To country's rite, and then, no beggar-taint
Retained, don vesture due next morrow-day.
What if I share the stranger's weakness then?
Well, could I also show his strength, his sense
Untutored, ay!—but then untampered with!

I fancy, though the world seems old enough,
Though Hellas be the sole unbarbarous land,
Years may conduct to such extreme of age,
And outside Hellas so isles new may lurk,
That haply,—when and where remain a dream!—
In fresh days when no Hellas fills the world,
In novel lands as strange where, all the same,
Their men and women yet behold, as we,
Blue heaven, black earth, and love, hate, hope and fear,
Over again, unhelped by Attiké—
Haply some philanthropic god steers bark,
Gift-laden, to the lonely ignorance
Islanded, say, where mist and snow mass hard
To metal—ay, those Kassiterides!
Then asks: "Ye apprehend the human form.
What of this statue, made to Pheidias' mind,
This picture, as it pleased our Zeuxis paint?
Ye too feel truth, love beauty: judge of these!"
Such strangers may judge feebly, stranger-like:
"Each hair too indistinct—for, see our own!

Hands, not skin-coloured as these hands we have,
And lo, the want of due decorum here!
A citizen, arrayed in civic garb,
Just as he walked your streets apparently,
Yet wears no sword by side, adventures thus,
In thronged Athenai! foolish painter's-freak!
While here 's his brother-sculptor found at fault
Still more egregiously, who shames the world,
Shows wrestler, wrestling at the public games,
Atrociously exposed from head to foot!"
Sure, the Immortal would impart at once
Our slow-stored knowledge, how small truths suppressed
Conduce to the far greater truth's display,—
Would replace simple by instructed sense,
And teach them how Athenai first so tamed
The natural fierceness that her progeny
Discarded arms nor feared the beast in man:
Wherefore at games, where earth's wise gratitude,
Proved by responsive culture, claimed the prize
For man's mind, body, each in excellence,—
When mind had bared itself, came body's turn,
And only irreligion grudged the gods
One naked glory of their master-work
Where all is glorious rightly understood,—
The human frame; enough that man mistakes:
Let him not think the gods mistaken too!

But, peradventure, if the stranger's eye
Detected . . . Ah, too high my fancy-flight!
Pheidias, forgive, and Zeuxis bear with me—
How on your faultless should I fasten fault
Of my own framing, even? Only say,—
Suppose the impossible were realized,
And some as patent incongruity,
Unseemliness,—of no more warrant, there
And then, than now and here, whate'er the time
And place,—I say, the Immortal—who can doubt?—
Would never shrink, but own "The blot escaped
Our artist: thus he shows humanity."

May stranger tax one peccant part in thee,
Poet, three-parts divine? May I proceed?

"Comedy is prescription and a rite."
Since when? No growth of the blind antique time,
"It rose in Attiké with liberty;
When freedom falls, it too will fall." Scarce so!
Your games,—the Olympian, Zeus gave birth to these;
Your Pythian,—these were Phoibos' institute.
Isthmian, Nemeian,—Theseus, Herakles
Appointed each, the boys and barbers say!
Earth's day is growing late: where 's Comedy
"Oh, that commenced an age since,—two, belike,—

In Megara, whence here they brought the thing!
Or I misunderstand, or here 's the fact—
Your grandsire could recall that rustic song,
How suchanone was thief, and miser such
And how,—immunity from chastisement
Once promised to bold singers of the same
By daylight on the drunkard's holiday,—
The clever fellow of the joyous troop
Tried acting what before he sang about,
Acted and stole, or hoarded, acting too:
While his companions ranged a-row, closed up
For Choros,—bade the general rabblement
Sit, see, hear, laugh,—not join the dance themselves.
Soon, the same clever fellow found a mate,
And these two did the whole stage-mimicking,
Still closer in approach to Tragedy,—
So led the way to Aristophanes,
Whose grandsire saw Sousarion, and whose sire—
Chionides; yourself wrote "Banqueters"
When Aischulos had made "Prometheus," nay,
All of the marvels; Sophokles,—I 'll cite,
"Oidipous"—and Euripides—I bend
The head—"Medeia" henceforth awed the world!
"Banqueters," "Babylonians"—next come you!
Surely the great days that left Hellas free
Happened before such advent of huge help,

Eighty-years-late assistance? Marathon,
Plataia, Salamis were fought, I think,
Before new educators stood reproved,
Or foreign legates blushed, excepted to!
Where did the helpful rite pretend its rise?
Did it break forth, as gifts divine are wont,
Plainly authentic, incontestably
Adequate to the helpful ordinance?
Founts, dowered with virtue, pulse out pure from source;
'T is there we taste the god's benign intent:
Not when,—fatigued away by journey, foul
With brutish trampling,—crystal sinks to slime,
And lymph forgets the first salubriousness.
Sprang Comedy to light thus crystal-pure?
"Nowise!" yourself protest with vehemence;
"Gross, bestial, did the clowns' diversion break;
Every successor paddled in the slush;
Nay, my contemporaries one and all
Gay played the mudlark till I joined their game;
Then was I first to change buffoonery
For wit, and stupid filth for cleanly sense,
Transforming pointless joke to purpose fine,
Transfusing rude enforcement of home-law—
'Drop knave's-tricks, deal more neighbour-like, ye boors!'—
With such new glory of poetic breath

As, lifting application far past use
O' the present, launched it o'er men's lowly heads
To future time, when high and low alike
Are dead and done with, while my airy power
Flies disengaged, as vapour from what stuff
It—say not, dwelt in—fitlier, dallied with
To forward work, which done,—deliverance brave,—
It soars away, and mud subsides to dust.
Say then, myself invented Comedy!"

So mouths full many a famed Parabasis!
Agreed! No more, then, of prescriptive use,
Authorization by antiquity,
For what offends our judgment! 'T is your work,
Performed your way: not work delivered you
Intact, intact producible in turn.
Everywhere have you altered old to new—
Your will, your warrant: therefore, work must stand
Or stumble by intrinsic worth. What worth?
Its aim and object! Peace you advocate,
And war would fain abolish from the land:
Support religion, lash irreverence,
Yet laughingly administer rebuke
To superstitious folly,—equal fault!
While innovating rashness, lust of change,
New laws, new habits, manners, men and things,

Make your main quarry,—"oldest" meaning "best."
You check the fretful litigation-itch,
Withstand mob-rule, expose mob-flattery,
Punish mob-favourites; most of all press hard
On sophists who assist the demagogue,
And poets their accomplices in crime.
Such your main quarry: by the way, you strike
Ignobler game, mere miscreants, snob or scamp,
Cowardly, gluttonous, effeminate:
Still with a bolt to spare when dramatist
Proves haply unproficient in his art.
Such aims—alone, no matter for the means—
Declare the unexampled excellence
Of their first author—Aristophanes!

Whereat—Euripides, oh, not thyself—
Augustlier than the need!—thy century
Of subjects dreamed and dared and done, before
"Banqueters" gave dark earth enlightenment,
Or "Babylonians" played Prometheus here,—
These let me summon to defend thy cause!
Lo, as indignantly took life and shape
Labour by labour, all of Herakles,—
Palpably fronting some o'erbold pretence
"Eurustheus slew the monsters, purged the world!"
So shall each poem pass you and imprint

Shame on the strange assurance. *You* praised Peace?
Sing him full-face, Kresphontes! "Peace" the theme?
"Peace, in whom depths of wealth lie,—of the blest
Immortals beauteousest,—
Come! for the heart within me dies away,
So long dost thou delay!
O I have feared lest old age, much annoy,
Conquer me, quite outstrip the tardy joy,
Thy gracious triumph-season I would see,
The song, the dance, the sport, profuse of crowns to be
But come! for my sake, goddess great and dear,
Come to the city here!
Hateful Sedition drive thou from our homes,
With Her who madly roams
Rejoicing in the steel against the life
That 's whetted—banish Strife!"

Shall I proceed? No need of next and next!
That were too easy, play so presses play,
Trooping tumultuous, each with instance apt,
Each eager to confute the idle boast.
What virtue but stands forth panegyrized,
What vice, unburned by stigma, in the books
Which bettered Hellas,—beyond graven gold
Or gem-indenture, sung by Phoibos' self
And saved in Kunthia's mountain treasure-house—

Ere you, man, moralist, were youth or boy?
—Not praise which, in the proffer, mocks the praised
By sly admixture of the blameworthy
And enforced coupling of base fellowship,—
Not blame which gloats the while it frowning laughs,
"Allow one glance on horrors—laughable!"—
This man's entire of heart and soul, discharged
Its love or hate, each unalloyed by each,
On objects worthy either; earnestness,
Attribute him, and power! but novelty?
Nor his nor yours a doctrine—all the world's!
What man of full-grown sense and sanity
Holds other than the truth,—wide Hellas through,—
Though truth, he acts, discredit truth he holds?
What imbecile has dared to formulate
"Love war, hate peace, become a litigant!"—
And so preach on, reverse each rule of right
Because he quarrels, combats, goes to law?
No, for his comment runs, with smile or sigh
According to heart's temper, "Peace were best,
Except occasions when we put aside
Peace, and bid all the blessings in her gift
Quick join the crows, for sake of Marathon!"

"Nay," you reply; for one, whose mind withstands
His heart, and, loving peace, for conscience' sake

Wants war,—you find a crowd of hypocrites
Whose conscience means ambition, grudge and greed.
On such, reproof, sonorous doctrine, melts
Distilled like universal but thin dew
Which all too sparsely covers country: dear,
No doubt, to universal crop and clown,
Still, each bedewed keeps his own head-gear dry
With upthrust *skiadeion*, shakes adroit
The droppings to his neighbour. No! collect
All of the moisture, leave unhurt the heads
Which nowise need a washing, save and store
And dash the whole condensed to one fierce spout
On some one evildoer, sheltered close,—
The fool supposed,—till you beat guard away,
And showed your audience, not that war was wrong,
But Lamachos absurd,—case, crests and all,—
Not that democracy was blind of choice,
But Kleon and Huperbolos were shams:
Not superstition vile, but Nikias crazed,—
The concrete for the abstract; that 's the way!
What matters Choros crying "Hence, impure!"
You cried "Ariphrades does thus and thus!"
Now, earnestness seems never earnest more
Than when it dons for garb—indifference;
So there 's much laughing: but, compensative,
When frowning follows laughter, then indeed

Scout innuendo, sarcasm, irony!—
Wit's polished warfare glancing at first graze
From off hard headpiece, coarsely-coated brain
O' the commonalty—whom, unless you prick
To purpose, what avails that finer pates
Succumb to simple scratching? Those—not these—
'T is Multitude, which, moved, fines Lamachos,
Banishes Kleon and burns Sokrates,
House over head, or, better, poisons him.
Therefore in dealing with King Multitude,
Club-drub the callous numskulls! In and in
Beat this essential consequential fact
That here they have a hater of the three,
Who hates in word, phrase, nickname, epithet
And illustration, beyond doubt at all!
And similarly, would you win assent
To—Peace, suppose? You tickle the tough hide
With good plain pleasure her concomitant—
And, past mistake again, exhibit Peace—
Peace, vintager and festive, cheesecake-time,
Hare-slice-and-peasoup-season, household joy:
Theoria's beautiful belongings match
Opora's lavish condescendings: brief,
Since here the people are to judge, you press
Such argument as people understand:
If with exaggeration—what care you?

Have I misunderstood you in the main?
No! then must answer be, such argument,
Such policy, no matter what good love
Or hate it help, in practice proves absurd,
Useless and null: henceforward intercepts
Sober effective blow at what you blame,
And renders nugatory rightful praise
Of thing or person. The coarse brush has daubed—
What room for the fine limner's pencil-mark?
Blame? You curse, rather, till who blames must blush—
Lean to apology or praise, more like!
Does garment, simpered o'er as white, prove grey?
"Black, blacker than Acharnian charcoal, black
Beyond Kimmerian, Stugian blackness black,"
You bawl, till men sigh "nearer snowiness!"
What follows? What one faint-rewarding fall
Of foe belaboured ne'er so lustily?
Laugh Lamachos from out the people's heart?
He died, commanding, "hero," say yourself!
Gibe Nikias into privacy?—nay, shake
Kleon a little from his arrogance
By cutting him to shoe-sole-shreds? I think,
He ruled his life long and, when time was ripe,
Died fighting for amusement,—good tough hide!
Sokrates still goes up and down the streets,
And Aristullos puts his speech in book,

When both should be abolished long ago.
Nay, wretchedest of rags, Ariphrades—
You have been fouling that redoubtable
Harp-player, twenty years, with what effect?
Still he strums on, strums ever cheerily,
And earns his wage,—"Who minds a joke?" men say.
No, friend! The statues stand—mudstained at most—
Titan or pygmy: what achieves their fall
Will be, long after mud is flung and spent,
Some clear thin spirit-thrust of lightning—truth!

Your praise, then—honey-smearing helps your friend.
More than blame's ordure-smirch hurts foe, perhaps?
Peace, now, misunderstood, ne'er prized enough,
You have interpreted to ignorance
Till ignorance opes eye, bat-blind before,
And for the first time knows Peace means the power
On maw of pan-cake, cheese-cake, barley-cake,
No stop nor stint to stuffing. While, in camp,
Who fights chews rancid tunny, onions raw,
Peace sits at cosy feast with lamp and fire,
Complaisant smooth-sleeked flute-girls giggling gay.
How thick and fast the snow falls, freezing War
Who shrugs, campaigns it, and may break a shin.
Or twist an ankle! come, who hesitates
To give Peace, over War, the preference?

Ah, friend—had this indubitable fact
Haply occurred to poor Leonidas,
How had he turned tail on Thermopulai!
It cannot be that even his few wits
Were addled to the point that, so advised,
Preposterous he had answered—"Cakes are prime,
Hearth-sides are snug, sleek dancing-girls have worth,
And yet—for country's sake, to save our gods
Their temples, save our ancestors their tombs,
Save wife and child and home and liberty,—
I would chew sliced-salt-fish, bear snow—nay, starve,
If need were,—and by much prefer the choice!"
Why, friend, your genuine hero, all the while,
Has been—who served precisely for your butt—
Kleonumos that, wise, cast shield away
On battle-ground; cried "Cake my buckler be,
Embossed with cream-clot! peace, not war, I choose,
Holding with Dikaiopolis!" Comedy
Shall triumph, Dikaiopolis win assent,
When Miltiades shall next shirk Marathon,
Themistokles swap Salamis for—cake,
And Kimon grunt "Peace, grant me dancing-girls!"
But sooner, hardly! twenty-five years since,
The war began,—such pleas for Peace have reached
A reasonable age. The end shows all.

And so with all the rest you advocate!
"Wise folk leave litigation! 'ware the wasps!
Whoso loves law and lawyers, heliast-like,
Wants hemlock!" None shows that so funnily.
But, once cure madness, how comports himself
Your sane exemplar, what 's our gain thereby?
Philokleon turns Bdelukleon! just this change,—
New sanity gets straightway drunk as sow,
Cheats baker-wives, brawls, kicks, cuffs, curses folk,
Parades a shameless flute-girl, bandies filth
With his own son who cured his father's cold
By making him catch fever—funnily!
But as for curing love of lawsuits—faugh!

And how does new improve upon the old
—Your boast—in even abusing? Rough, may be—
Still, honest was the old mode. "Call thief—thief!"
But never call thief even—murderer!
Much less call fop and fribble, worse one whit
Than fribble and fop! Spare neither! beat your brains
For adequate invective,—cut the life
Clean out each quality,—but load your lash
With no least lie, or we pluck scourge from hand!
Does poet want a whipping, write bad verse,
Inculcate foul deeds? There 's the fault to flog!
You vow "The rascal cannot read nor write,

Spends more in buying fish than Morsimos,
Somebody helps his Muse and courts his wife,
His uncle deals in crockery, and last,—
Himself 's a stranger!" That 's the cap and crown
Of stinging-nettle, that 's the master-stroke!
What poet-rival,—after "housebreaker,"
"Fish-gorging," "midnight footpad" and so forth,—
Proves not, beside, "a stranger"? Chased from charge
To charge, and, lie by lie, laughed out of court,—
Lo, wit's sure refuge, satire's grand resource—
All, from Kratinos downward—"strangers" they!
Pity the trick 's too facile! None so raw
Among your playmates but have caught the ball
And sent it back as briskly to—yourself!
You too, my Attic, are styled "stranger"—Rhodes,
Aigina, Lindos or Kameiros,—nay,
'T was Egypt reared, if Eupolis be right,
Who wrote the comedy (Kratinos vows)
Kratinos helped a little! Kleon's self
Was nigh promoted Comic, when he haled
My poet into court, and o'er the coals
Hauled and re-hauled "the stranger,— insolent,
Who brought out plays, usurped our privilege!"
Why must you Comics one and all take stand
On lower ground than truth from first to last?
Why all agree to let folk disbelieve,

So laughter but reward a funny lie?
Repel such onslaughts—answer, sad and grave,
Your fancy-fleerings—who would stoop so low?
Your own adherents whisper,—when disgust
Too menacingly thrills Logeion through
At—Perikles invents this present war
Because men robbed his mistress of three maids—
Or—Sokrates wants burning, house o'er head,—
"What, so obtuse, not read between the lines?
Our poet means no mischief! All should know—
Ribaldry here implies a compliment!
He deals with things, not men,—his men are things—
Each represents a class, plays figure-head
And names the ship: no meaner than the first
Would serve; he styles a trireme 'Sokrates'—
Fears 'Sokrates' may prove unseaworthy
(That 's merely—'Sophists are the bane of boys')
Rat-riddled ('they are capable of theft'),
Rotten or whatsoe'er shows ship-disease,
('They war with gods and worship whirligig').
You never took the joke for earnest? scarce
Supposed mere figure-head meant entire ship,
And Sokrates—the whole fraternity?"

This then is Comedy, our sacred song,
Censor of vice, and virtue's guard as sure:

Manners-instructing, morals' stop-estray,
Which, born a twin with public liberty,
Thrives with its welfare, dwindles with its wane!
Liberty? what so exquisitely framed
And fitted to suck dry its life of life
To last faint fibre?—since that life is truth.
You who profess your indignation swells
At sophistry, when specious words confuse
Deeds right and wrong, distinct before, you say—
(Though all that 's done is—dare veracity,
Show that the true conception of each deed
Affirmed, in vulgar parlance, "wrong" or "right,"
Proves to be neither, as the hasty hold,
But, change your side, shoots light, where dark alone
Was apprehended by the vulgar sense)
You who put sophistry to shame, and shout
"There 's but a single side to man and thing;
A side so much more big than thing or man
Possibly can be, that—believe 't is true?
Such were too marvellous simplicity!"—
Confess, those sophists whom yourself depict,
(—Abide by your own painting!) what they teach,
They wish at least their pupil to believe,
And, what believe, to practise! Did *you* wish
Hellas should haste, as taught, with torch in hand,
And fire the horrid Speculation-shop?

Straight the shop's master rose and showed the mob
What man was your so monstrous Sokrates;
Himself received amusement, why not they?
Just as did Kleon first play magistrate
And bid you put your birth in evidence—
Since no unbadged buffoon is licensed here
To shame us all when foreign guests may mock—
Then,—birth established, fooling licensed you,—
He, duty done, resumed mere auditor,
Laughed with the loudest at his Lamia-shape,
Kukloboros-roaring, and the camel-rest.
Nay, Aristullos,—once your volley spent
On the male-Kirké and her swinish crew,—
PLATON,—so others call the youth we love,—
Sends your performance to the curious king—
"Do you desire to know Athenai's knack
At turning seriousness to pleasantry?
Read this! One Aristullos means myself.
The author is indeed a merry grig!"
Nay, it would seem as if yourself were bent
On laying down the law "Tell lies I must—
Aforethought and of purpose, no mistake!"
When forth yourself step, tell us from the stage
"Here you behold the King of Comedy—
Me, who, the first, have purged my every piece
From each and all my predecessors' filth,

Abjured those satyr-adjuncts sewn to bid
The boys laugh, satyr-jokes whereof not one
Least sample but would make my hair turn grey
Beyond a twelvemonth's ravage! I renounce
Mountebank-claptrap, such as firework-fizz
And torchflare, or else nuts and barleycorns
Scattered among the crowd, to scramble for
And stop their mouths with; no such stuff shames me!
Who,—what 's more serious,—know both when to strike
And when to stay my hand: once dead, my foe,
Why, done, my fighting! *I* attack a corpse?
I spare the corpse-like even! punish age?
I pity from my soul that sad effete
Toothless old mumbler called Kratinos! once
My rival,—now, alack, the dotard slinks
Ragged and hungry to what hole 's his home;
Ay, slinks thro' byways where no passenger
Flings him a bone to pick. You formerly
Adored the Muses' darling: dotard now,
Why, he may starve! O mob most mutable!"
So you harangued in person; while,—to point
Precisely out, these were but lies you launched,—
Prompt, a play followed primed with satyr-frisks,
No spice spared of the stomach-turning stew,
Full-fraught with torch-display, and barley-throw,
And Kleon, dead enough, bedaubed afresh;

While daft Kratinos—home to hole trudged he,
Wrung dry his wit to the last vinous dregs,
Decanted them to "Bottle,"—beat, next year,—
"Bottle" and dregs—your best of "Clouds" and dew!
Where, Comic King, may keenest eye detect
Improvement on your predecessors' work
Except in lying more audaciously?

Why—genius! That 's the grandeur, that 's the gold—
That 's *you*—superlatively true to touch—
Gold, leaf or lump—gold, anyhow the mass
Takes manufacture and proves Pallas' casque
Or, at your choice, simply a cask to keep
Corruption from decay. Your rivals' hoard
May ooze forth, lacking such preservative:
Yours cannot—gold plays guardian far too well!
Genius, I call *you*: dross, your rivals share;
Ay, share and share alike, too! says the world,
However you pretend supremacy
In aught beside that gold, your very own.
Satire? "Kratinos for our satirist!"
The world cries. Elegance? "Who elegant
As Eupolis?" resounds as noisily.
Artistic fancy? Choros-creatures quaint?
Magnes invented "Birds" and "Frogs" enough,
Archippos punned, Hegemon parodied,

To heart's content, before you stepped on stage.
Moral invective? Eupolis exposed
"That prating beggar, he who stole the cup,"
Before your "Clouds" rained grime on Sokrates;
Nay, what beat "Clouds" but "Konnos," muck for mud?
Courage? How long before, well-masked, you poured
Abuse on Eukrates and Lusikles,
Did Telekleides and Hermippos pelt
Their Perikles and Kumon? standing forth,
Bareheaded, not safe crouched behind a name,—
Philonides or else Kallistratos,
Put forth, when danger threatened,—mask for face,
To bear the brunt,—if blame fell, take the blame,—
If praise . . . why, frank laughed Aristophanes
"They write such rare stuff? No, I promise you!"
Rather, I see all true improvements, made
Or making, go against you—tooth and nail
Contended with; 't is still Moruchides,
'T is Euthumenes, Surakosios, nay,
Argurrhios and Kinesias,—common sense
And public shame, these only cleanse your stye!
Coerced, prohibited,—you grin and bear,
And, soon as may be, hug to heart again
The banished nastiness too dear to drop!
Krates could teach and practise festive song
Yet scorn scurrility; as gay and good,

Pherekrates could follow. *Who* loosed hold,
Must let fall rose-wreath, stoop to muck once more?
Did your particular self advance in aught,
Task the sad genius—steady slave the while—
To further—say, the patriotic aim?
No, there 's deterioration manifest
Year by year, play by play! survey them all,
From that boy's-triumph when "Acharnes" dawned,
To "Thesmophoriazousai,"—this man's-shame!
There, truly, patriot zeal so prominent
Allowed friends' plea perhaps: the baser stuff
Was but the nobler spirit's vehicle.
Who would imprison, unvolatilize
A violet's perfume, blends with fatty oils
Essence too fugitive in flower alone;
So, calling unguent—violet, call the play—
Obscenity impregnated with "Peace"!
But here 's the boy grown bald, and here 's the play
With twenty years' experience: where 's one spice
Of odour in the hog's-lard? what pretends
To aught except a grease-pot's quality?
Friend, sophist-hating! know,—worst sophistry
Is when man's own soul plays its own self false,
Reasons a vice into a virtue, pleads
"I detail sin to shame its author"—not
"I shame Ariphrades for sin's display"!

"I show Opora to commend Sweet Home"—
Not "I show Bacchis for the striplings' sake!"

Yet all the same—O genius and O gold—
Had genius ne'er diverted gold from use
Worthy the temple, to do copper's work
And coat a swine's trough—which abundantly
Might furnish Phoibos' tripod, Pallas' throne!
Had you, I dream, discarding all the base,
The brutish, spurned alone convention's watch
And ward against invading decency
Disguised as license, law in lawlessness,
And so, re-ordinating outworn rule,
Made Comedy and Tragedy combine,
Prove some new Both-yet-neither, all one bard,
Euripides with Aristophanes
Coöperant! this, reproducing Now
As that gave Then existence: Life to-day,
This, as that other—Life dead long ago!
The mob decrees such feat no crown, perchance,
But—why call crowning the reward of quest?
Tell him, my other poet,—where thou walk'st
Some rarer world than e'er Ilissos washed!

But dream goes idly in the air. To earth!
Earth's question just amounts to—which succeeds,

Which fails of two life-long antagonists?
Suppose my charges all mistake! assume
Your end, despite ambiguous means, the best—
The only! you and he, a patriot-pair,
Have striven alike for one result– say, Peace!
You spoke your best straight to the arbiters—
Our people: have you made them end this war
By dint of laughter and abuse and lies
And postures of Opora? Sadly—No!
This war, despite your twenty-five years' work,
May yet endure until Athenai falls,
And freedom falls with her. So much for you!
Now, the antagonist Euripides—
Has he succeeded better? Who shall say?
He spoke quite o'er the heads of Kleon's crowd
To a dim future, and if there he fail,
Why, you are fellows in adversity.
But that 's unlike the fate of wise words launched
By music on their voyage. Hail, Depart,
Arrive, Glad Welcome! Not my single wish—
Yours also wafts the white sail on its way,
Your nature too is kingly. All beside
I call pretension—no true potentate,
Whatever intermediary be crowned,
Zeus or Poseidon, where the vulgar sky

Lacks not Triballos to complete the group.
I recognize,—behind such phantom-crew,—
Necessity, Creation, Poet's Power,
Else never had I dared approach, appeal
To poetry, power, Aristophanes!
But I trust truth's inherent kingliness,
Trust who, by reason of much truth, shall reign
More or less royally—may prayer but push
His sway past limit, purge the false from true!
Nor, even so, had boldness nerved my tongue
But that the other king stands suddenly,
In all the grand investiture of death,
Bowing your knee beside my lowly head—
Equals one moment!

Now, arise and go!
Both have done homage to Euripides!

Silence pursued the words: till he broke out—

"Scarce so! This constitutes, I may believe,
Sufficient homage done by who defames
Your poet's foe, since you account me such;
But homage-proper,—pay it by defence
Of him, direct defence and not oblique,
Not by mere mild admonishment of me!

Defence? The best, the only! I replied.
A story goes—When Sophokles, last year,
Cited before tribunal by his son
(A poet—to complete the parallel)
Was certified unsound of intellect,
And claimed as only fit for tutelage,
Since old and doating and incompetent
To carry on this world's work,—the defence
Consisted just in his reciting (calm
As the verse bore, which sets our heart a-swell
And voice a-heaving too tempestuously)
That choros-chant "The station of the steed,
Stranger! thou comest to,—Kolonos white!"
Then he looked round and all revolt was dead.
You know the one adventure of my life—
What made Euripides Balaustion's friend.
When I last saw him, as he bade farewell,
"I sang another 'Herakles,'" smiled he;
"It gained no prize: your love be prize I gain!
Take it—the tablets also where I traced
The story first with stulos pendent still ··
Nay, the psalterion may complete the gift,
So, should you croon the ode bewailing Age,
Yourself shall modulate—same notes, same strings—
With the old friend who loved Balaustion once."
There they lie! When you broke our solitude,

We were about to honour him once more
By reading the consummate Tragedy.
Night is advanced; I have small mind to sleep;
May I go on, and read,—so make defence,
So test true godship? You affirm, not I,
—Beating the god, affords such test: *I* hold
That when rash hands but touch divinity,
The chains drop off, the prison-walls dispart,
And—fire—he fronts mad Pentheus! Dare we try?

Accordingly I read the perfect piece.

HERAKLES.

AMPHITRUON.

Zeus' Couchmate,—who of mortals knows not me,
Argive Amphitruon whom Alkaios sired
Of old, as Perseus him, I—Herakles?
My home, this Thebai where the earth-born spike
Of Sown-ones burgeoned: Ares saved from these
A handful of their seed that stocks to-day
With children's children Thebai, Kadmos built.
Of these had Kreon birth, Menoikeus' child,
King of the country,—Kreon that became
The father of this woman, Megara,
Whom, when time was, Kadmeians one and all
Pealed praise to, marriage-songs with fluted help,
While to my dwelling that grand Herakles
Bore her, his bride. But, leaving Thebes—where I
Abode perforce—this Megara and those

Her kinsmen, the desire possessed my son
Rather to dwell in Argos, that walled work,
Kuklopian city, which I fly, myself,
Because I slew Elektruon. Seeking so
To ease away my hardships and once more
Inhabit his own land, for my return
Heavy the price he pays Eurustheus there—
The letting in of light on this choked world!
Either he promised, vanquished by the goad
Of Heré, or because fate willed it thus.
The other labours—why, he toiled them through;
But for this last one—down by Tainaros,
Its mouth, to Haides' realm descended he
To drag into the light the three-shaped hound
Of Hell: whence Herakles returns no more.
Now, there 's an old-world tale, Kadmeians have,
How Dirké's husband was a Lukos once,
Holding the seven-towered city here in sway
Before they ruled the land, white-steeded pair,
The twins Amphion, Zethos, born to Zeus.
This Lukos' son,—named like his father too,
No born Kadmeian but Euboia's gift,—
Comes and kills Kreon, lords it o'er the land,
Falling upon our town sedition-sick.
To us, akin to Kreon, just that bond
Becomes the worst of evils, seemingly;

For, since my son is in the earth's abysms,
This man of valour, Lukos, lord and king,
Seeks now to slay these sons of Herakles,
And slay his wife as well,—by murder thus
Thinking to stamp out murder,—slay too me,
(If me 't is fit you count among men still,—
Useless old age) and all for fear lest these,
Grown men one day, exact due punishment
Of bloodshed and their mother's father's fate.
I therefore, since he leaves me in these domes,
The children's household guardian,—left, when earth's
Dark dread he underwent, that son of mine,—
I, with their mother, lest his boys should die,
Sit at this altar of the saviour Zeus
Which, glory of triumphant spear, he raised
Conquering—my nobly-born!—the Minuai.
Here do we guard our station, destitute
Of all things, drink, food, raiment, on bare ground
Couched side by side: sealed out of house and home:
Sit we in a resourcelessness of help.
Our friends—why, some are no true friends, I see!
The rest, that are true, want the means to aid.
So operates in man adversity:
Whereof may never anybody—no,
Though half of him should really wish me well,—
Happen to taste! a friend-test faultless, that!

MEGARA

Old man, who erst didst raze the Taphian town,
Illustriously, the army-leader, thou,
Of speared Kadmeians—how gods play men false!
I, now, missed nowise fortune in my sire,
Who, for his wealth, was boasted mighty once,
Having supreme rule,—for the love of which
Leap the long lances forth at favoured breasts,—
And having children too: and me he gave
Thy son, his house with that of Herakles
Uniting by the far-famed marriage-bed.
And now these things are dead and flown away,
While thou and I await our death, old man,
These Herakleian boys too, whom—my chicks—
I save beneath my wings like brooding bird.
But one or other falls to questioning
"O mother," cries he, "where in all the world
Is father gone to? What 's he doing? when
Will he come back?" At fault through tender years,
They seek their sire. For me, I put them off,
Telling them stories; at each creak of doors,
All wonder "Does he come?"—and all a-foot
Make for the fall before the parent knee.
Now then, what hope, what method of escape
Facilitatest thou?—for, thee, old man,

I look to,—since we may not leave by stealth
The limits of the land, and guards, more strong
Than we, are at the outlets: nor in friends
Remain to us the hopes of safety more.
Therefore, whatever thy decision be,
Impart it for the common good of all!
Lest now should prove the proper time to die,
Though, being weak, we spin it out and live.

AMPHITRUON.

Daughter, it scarce is easy, do one's best,
To blurt out counsel, things at such a pass.

MEGARA.

You want some sorrow more, or so love life?

AMPHITRUON.

I both enjoy life, and love hopes beside.

MEGARA.

And I; but hope against hope—no, old man!

AMPHITRUON.

In these delayings of an ill lurks cure.

MEGARA.

But bitter is the meantime, and it bites.

AMPHITRUON.

O there may be a run before the wind
From out these present ills, for me and thee,
Daughter, and yet may come my son, thy spouse!
But hush! and from the children take away
Their founts a-flow with tears, and talk them calm
Steal them by stories—sad theft, all the same!
For, human troubles—they grow weary too;
Neither the wind-blasts always have their strength
Nor happy men keep happy to the end:
Since all things change—their natures part in twain;
And that man 's bravest, therefore, who hopes on,
Hopes ever: to despair is coward-like.

CHOROS.

These domes that overroof,
This long-used couch, I come to, having made
A staff my prop, that song may put to proof
The swan-like power, age-whitened,—poet's aid
Of sobbed-forth dirges—words that stand aloof
From action now: such am I—just a shade

With night for all its face, a mere night-dream—
And words that tremble too: howe'er they seem,
Devoted words, I deem.

O, of a father ye unfathered ones,
O thou old man, and thou whose groaning stuns—
Unhappy mother—only us above,
Nor reaches him below in Haides' realm, thy love!
—(Faint not too soon, urge forward foot and limb
Way-weary, nor lose courage—as some horse
Yoked to the car whose weight recoils on him
Just at the rock-ridge that concludes his course!
Take by the hand, the peplos, anyone
Whose foothold fails him, printless and fordone!
Aged, assist along me aged too,
Who,—mate with thee in toils when life was new,
And shields and spears first made acquaintanceship,—
Stood by thyself and proved no bastard-slip
Of fatherland when loftiest glory grew.)—
See now, how like the sire's
Each eyeball fiercely fires!
What though ill-fortune have not left his race?
Neither is gone the grand paternal grace!
Hellas! O what—what combatants, destroyed
In these, wilt thou one day seek—seek, and find all
void!

Pause! for I see the ruler of this land,
Lukos, now passing through the palace-gate.

LUKOS.

The Herakleian couple—father, wife—
If needs I must, I question: "must" forsooth?
Being your master—all I please, I ask.
To what time do you seek to spin out life?
What hope, what help see, so as not to die?
Is it you trust the sire of these, that 's sunk
In Haides, will return? How past the pitch,
Suppose you have to die, you pile the woe—
Thou, casting, Hellas through, thy empty vaunts
As though Zeus helped thee to a god for son;
And thou, that thou wast styled our best man's wife!
Where was the awful in his work wound up,
If he did quell and quench the marshy snake
Or the Nemeian monster whom he snared
And—says, by throttlings of his arm, he slew?
With these do you outwrestle me? Such feats
Shall save from death the sons of Herakles
Who got praise, being nought, for bravery
In wild-beast-battle, otherwise a blank?
No man to throw on left arm buckler's weight,
Not he, nor get in spear's reach! bow he bore—

True coward's-weapon: shoot first and then fly!
No bow-and-arrow proves a man is brave,
But who keeps rank,—stands, one unwinking stare
As, ploughing up, the darts come,—brave is he.
My action has no impudence, old man!
Providence, rather: for I own I slew
Kreon, this woman's sire, and have his seat.
Nowise I wish, then, to leave, these grown up,
Avengers on me, payment for my deeds.

AMPHITRUON.

As to the part of Zeus in his own child,
Let Zeus defend that! As to mine, 't is me
The care concerns to show by argument
The folly of this fellow,—Herakles,
Whom I stand up for! since to hear thee styled—
Cowardly—that is unendurable.
First then, the infamous (for I account
Amongst the words denied to human speech,
Timidity ascribed thee, Herakles!)
This I must put from thee, with gods in proof.
Zeus' thunder I appeal to, those four steeds
Whereof he also was the charioteer
When, having shot down the earth's Giant-growth—
(Never shaft flew but found and fitted flank)

Triumph he sang in common with the gods.
The Kentaur-race, four footed insolence—
Go ask at Pholoé, vilest thou of kings,
Whom they would pick out and pronounce best man,
If not my son, "the seeming-brave," say'st thou!
But Dirphus, thy Abantid mother-town,
Question her, and she would not praise, I think!
For there 's no spot, where having done some good,
Thy country thou mightst call to witness worth.
Now, that all-wise invention, archer's-gear,
Thou blamest: hear my teaching and grow sage!
A man in armour is his armour's slave,
And, mixed with rank and file that want to run,
He dies because his neighbours have lost heart.
Then, should he break his spear, no way remains
Of warding death off,—gone that body-guard,
His one and only; while, whatever folk
Have the true bow-hand,—here 's the one main good,—
Though he have sent ten thousand shafts abroad,
Others remain wherewith the archer saves
His limbs and life, too,—stands afar and wards
Away from flesh the foe that vainly stares
Hurt by the viewless arrow, while himself
Offers no full front to those opposite,
But keeps in thorough cover: there 's the point
That 's capital in combat – damage foe,

Yet keep a safe skin—foe not out of reach
As you are! Thus my words contrast with thine,
And such, in judging facts, our difference.
These children, now, why dost thou seek to slay?
What have they done thee? In a single point
I count thee wise—if, being base thyself,
Thou dread'st the progeny of nobleness.
Yet this bears hard upon us, all the same,
If we must die—because of fear in thee—
A death 't were fit thou suffer at our hands,
Thy betters, did Zeus rightly judge us all.
If therefore thou art bent on sceptre-sway,
Thyself, here—suffer us to leave the land,
Fugitives! nothing do by violence,
Or violence thyself shalt undergo
When the gods' gale may chance to change for thee!
Alas, O land of Kadmos,—for 't is thee
I mean to close with, dealing out the due
Revilement,—in such sort dost thou defend
Herakles and his children? Herakles
Who, coming, one to all the world, against
The Minuai, fought them and left Thebes an eye
Unblinded henceforth to front freedom with!
Neither do I praise Hellas, nor shall brook
Ever to keep in silence that I count
Towards my son, craven of cravens—her

Whom it behoved go bring the young ones here
Fire, spears, arms—in exchange for seas made safe,
And cleansings of the land—his labour's price.
But fire, spears, arms,—O children, neither Thebes
Nor Hellas has them for you! 'T is myself,
A feeble friend, ye look to: nothing now
But a tongue's murmur, for the strength is gone
We had once, and with age are limbs a-shake
And force a-flicker! Were I only young,
Still with the mastery o'er bone and thew,
Grasping first spear that came, the yellow locks
Of this insulter would I bloody so—
Should send him skipping o'er the Atlantic bounds
Out of my arm's reach through poltroonery!

CHOROS.

Have not the really good folk starting-points
For speech to purpose,—though rare talkers they?

LUKOS.

Say thou against us words thou towerest with!
I, for thy words, will deal thee blows, their due.
Go, some to Helikon, to Parnasos
Come, and the clefts there! Bid the woodmen fell

Oak-trunks, and, when the same are brought inside
The city, pile the altar round with logs,
Then fire it, burn the bodies of them all,
That they may learn thereby, no dead man rules
The land here, but 't is I, by acts like these!
As for you, old sirs, who are set against
My judgments, you shall groan for—not alone
The Herakleian children, but the fate
Of your own house beside, when faring ill
By any chance: and you shall recollect
Slaves are you of a tyranny that 's mine!

CHOROS.

O progeny of earth,—whom Ares sowed
When he laid waste the dragon's greedy jaw—
Will ye not lift the staves, right-hand supports,
And bloody this man's irreligious head?
Who, being no Kadmeian, rules,—the wretch,—
Our easy youth: an interloper too!
But not of me, at least, shalt thou enjoy
Thy lordship ever; nor my labour's fruit,—
Hand worked so hard for,—have! A curse with thee,
Whence thou didst come, there go and tyrannize!
For never while I live shalt thou destroy
The Herakleian children: not so deep

Hides he below ground, leaving thee their lord!
But we bear both of you in mind,—that thou,
The land's destroyer, dost possess the land,
While he who saved it, loses every right.
I play the busybody—for I serve
My dead friends when they need friends' service most?
O right-hand, how thou yearnest to snatch spear
And serve indeed! in weakness dies the wish,
Or I had stayed thee calling me a slave,
And nobly drawn my breath at home in Thebes
Where thou exultest!—city that 's insane,
Sick through sedition and bad government,
Else never had she gained for master—thee!

MEGARA.

Old friends, I praise you: since a righteous wrath
For friend's sake well becomes a friend. But no!
On our account in anger with your lord,
Suffer no injury! Hear my advice,
Amphitruon, if I seem to speak aright.
O yes, I love my children! how not love
What I brought forth, what toiled for? and to die—
Sad I esteem too; still, the fated way
Who stiffens him against, that man I count
Poor creature; us, who are of other mood,

Since we must die, behoves us meet our death
Not burnt to cinders, giving foes the laugh—
To me, worse ill than dying, that! We owe
Our houses many a brave deed, now to pay.
Thee, indeed, gloriously men estimate
For spear-work, so that unendurable
Were it that thou shouldst die a death of shame.
And for my glorious husband, where wants he
A witness that he would not save his boys
If touched in their good fame thereby? Since birth
Bears ill with baseness done for children's sake,
My husband needs must be my pattern here.
See now thy hope—how much I count thereon!
Thou thinkest that thy son will come to light:
And, of the dead, who came from Haides back?
But we with talk this man might mollify:
Never! Of all foes, fly the foolish one!
Wise, well-bred people, make concession to!
Sooner you meet respect by speaking soft.
Already it was in my mind—perchance
We might beg off these children's banishment;
But even that is sad, involving them
In safety, ay—and piteous poverty!
Since the host's visage for the flying friend
Has, only one day, the sweet look, 't is said.
Dare with us death, which waits thee, dared or no!

We call on thine ancestral worth, old man!
For who outlabours what the gods appoint
Shows energy, but energy gone mad.
Since what must—none e'er makes what must not be.

CHOROS.

Had anyone, while yet my arms were strong,
Been scorning thee, he easily had ceased.
But we are nought, now; thine henceforth to see—
Amphitruon, how to push aside these fates!

AMPHITRUON.

Nor cowardice nor a desire of life
Stops me from dying: but I seek to save
My son his children. Vain! I set my heart,
It seems, upon impossibility.
See, it is ready for the sword, this throat
To pierce, divide, dash down from precipice!
But one grace grant us, king, we supplicate!
Slay me and this unhappy one before
The children, lest we see them—impious sight!—
Gasping the soul forth, calling all the while
On mother and on father's father! Else,
Do as thy heart inclines thee! No resource
Have we from death, and we resign ourselves.

MEGARA.

And I too supplicate: add grace to grace,
And, though but one man, doubly serve us both!
Let me bestow adornment of the dead
Upon these children! Throw the palace wide!
For now we are shut out. Thence these shall share
At least so much of wealth was once their sire's!

LUKOS.

These things shall be. Withdraw the bolts, I bid
My servants! Enter and adorn yourselves!
I grudge no peploi; but when these ye wind
About your bodies,—that adornment done,—
Then I shall come and give you to the grave.

MEGARA.

O children, follow this unhappy foot,
Your mother's, into your ancestral home,
Where others have the power, are lords in truth,
Although the empty name is left us yet!

AMPHITRUON.

O Zeus, in vain I had thee marriage-mate,
In vain I called thee father of my child!

Thou wast less friendly far than thou didst seem.
I, the mere man, o'ermatch in virtue thee
The mighty god: for I have not betrayed
The Herakleian children,—whereas thou
Hadst wit enough to come clandestinely
Into the chamber, take what no man gave,
Another's place; and when it comes to help
Thy loved ones, there thou lackest wit indeed!
Thou art some stupid god or born unjust.

CHOROS.

Even a dirge, can Phoibos suit
In song to music jubilant
For all its sorrow: making shoot
His golden plectron o'er the lute,
Melodious ministrant.
And I, too, am of mind to raise,
Despite the imminence of doom,
A song of joy, outpour my praise
To him—what is it rumour says?—
Whether—now buried in the ghostly gloom
Below ground,—he was child of Zeus indeed,
Or mere Amphitruon's mortal seed—
To him I weave the wreath of song, his labour's meed.
For, is my hero perished in the feat?

The virtues of brave toils, in death complete,
These save the dead in song,—their glory-garland meet!

First, then, he made the wood
Of Zeus a solitude,
Slaying its lion-tenant; and he spread
The tawniness behind—his yellow head
Enmuffled by the brute's, backed by that grin of dread.
The mountain-roving savage Kentaur-race
He strewed with deadly bow about their place,
Slaying with winged shafts: Peneios knew,
Beauteously-eddying, and the long tracts too
Of pasture trampled fruitless, and as well
Those desolated haunts Mount Pelion under,
And, grassy up to Homolé, each dell
Whence, having filled their hands with pine-tree plunder,
Horse-like was wont to prance from, and subdue
The land of Thessaly, that bestial crew.
The golden-headed spot-back'd stag he slew,
That robber of the rustics: glorified
Therewith the goddess who in hunter's pride
Slaughters the game along Oinoé's side.
And, yoked abreast, he brought the chariot-breed
To pace submissive to the bit, each steed
That in the bloody cribs of Diomede
Champed and, unbridled, hurried down that gore

For grain, exultant the dread feast before—
Of man's flesh: hideous feeders they of yore!
All as he crossed the Hebros' silver-flow
Accomplished he such labour, toiling so
For Mukenaian tyrant; ay, and more—
He crossed the Melian shore
And, by the sources of Amauros, shot
To death that strangers'-pest
Kuknos, who dwelt in Amphanaia: not
Of fame for good to guest!

And next, to the melodious maids he came,
Inside the Hesperian court-yard: hand must aim
At plucking gold fruit from the appled leaves.
Now he had killed the dragon, backed like flame,
Who guards the unapproachable he weaves
Himself all round, one spire about the same.
And into those sea-troughs of ocean dived
The hero, and for mortals calm contrived,
Whatever oars should follow in his wake.
And under heaven's mid-seat his hands thrust he,
At home with Atlas: and, for valour's sake,
Held the gods up their star-faced mansionry.
Also, the rider-host of Amazons
About Maiotis many-streamed, he went
To conquer through the billowy Euxin once,

Having collected what an armament
Of friends from Hellas, all on conquest bent
Of that gold-garnished cloak, dread girdle-chase!
So Hellas gained the girl's barbarian grace
And at Mukenai saves the trophy still—
Go wonder there, who will!

And the ten thousand-headed hound
Of many a murder, the Lernaian snake
He burned out, head by head, and cast around
His darts a poison thence,—darts soon to slake
Their rage in that three-bodied herdsman's gore
Of Erutheia. Many a running more
He made for triumph and felicity,
And, last of toils, to Haides, never dry
Of tears, he sailed: and there he, luckless, ends
His life completely, nor returns again.
The house and home are desolate of friends,
And where the children's life-path leads them, plain
I see,—no step retraceable, no god
Availing, and no law to help the lost!
The oar of Charon marks their period,
Waits to end all. Thy hands, these roofs accost!—
To thee, though absent, look their uttermost!

But if in youth and strength I flourished still,

Still shook the spear in fight, did power match will
In these Kadmeian co-mates of my age,
They would,—and I,—when warfare was to wage,
Stand by these children; but I am bereft
Of youth now, lone of that good genius left!

But hist, desist! for here come these,—
Draped as the dead go, under and over,—
Children long since,—now hard to discover,—
Of the once so potent Herakles!
And the loved wife dragging, in one tether
About her feet, the boys together;
And the hero's aged sire comes last!
Unhappy that I am! Of tears which rise,—
How am I all unable to hold fast,
Longer, the aged fountains of these eyes!

MEGARA.

Be it so! Who is priest, who butcher here
Of these ill-fated ones, or stops the breath
Of me, the miserable? Ready, see,
The sacrifice—to lead where Haides lives!
O children, we are led—no lovely team
Of corpses—age, youth, motherhood, all mixed!

O sad fate of myself and these my sons
Whom with these eyes I look at, this last time!
I, indeed, bore you: but for enemies
I brought you up to be a laughing-stock,
Matter for merriment, destruction-stuff!
Woe 's me!
Strangely indeed my hopes have struck me down
From what I used to hope about you once—
The expectation from your father's talk!
For thee, now, thy dead sire dealt Argos to:
Thou wast to have Eurustheus' house one day,
And rule Pelasgia where the fine fruits grow;
And, for a stole of state, he wrapped about
Thy head with that the lion-monster bore,
That which himself went wearing armour-wise.
And thou wast King of Thebes—such chariots there!
Those plains I had for portion—all for thee,
As thou hadst coaxed them out of who gave birth
To thee, his boy: and into thy right hand
He thrust the guardian-club of Daidalos,—
Poor guardian proves the gift that plays thee false!
And upon thee he promised to bestow
Oichalia—what, with those far-shooting shafts,
He ravaged once; and so, since three you were,
With threefold kingdoms did he build you up

To very towers, your father,—proud enough
Prognosticating, from your manliness
In boyhood, what the manhood's self would be.
For my part, I was picking out for you
Brides, suiting each with his alliance—this
From Athens, this from Sparté, this from Thebes—
Whence, suited—as stern-cables steady ship—
You might have hold on life gods bless. All gone!
Fortune turns round and gives us—you, the Fates
Instead of brides—me, tears for nuptial baths,
Unhappy in my hoping! And the sire
Of your sire—he prepares the marriage-feast
Befitting Haides who plays father now—
Bitter relationship! Oh me! which first—
Which last of you shall I to bosom fold?
To whom shall I fit close, his mouth to mine?
Of whom shall I lay hold and ne'er let go?
How would I gather, like the brown-winged bee,
The groans from all, and, gathered into one,
Give them you back again, a crowded tear!
Dearest, if any voice be heard of men
Dungeoned in Haides, thee—to thee I speak!
Here is thy father dying, and thy boys!
And I too perish, famed as fortunate
By mortals once, through thee! Assist them!
Come!

But come! though just a shade, appear to me!
For, coming, thy ghost-grandeur would suffice,
Such cowards are they in thy presence, these
Who kill thy children now thy back is turned!

AMPHITRUON.

Ay, daughter, bid the powers below assist!
But I will rather, raising hand to heaven,
Call thee to help, O Zeus, if thy intent
Be, to these children, helpful anyway,
Since soon thou wilt be valueless enough!
And yet thou hast been called and called; in vain
I labour: for we needs must die, it seems.
Well, aged brothers—life 's a little thing!
Such as it is, then, pass life pleasantly
From day to night, nor once grieve all the while!
Since Time concerns him not about our hopes,—
To save them,—but his own work done, flies off.
Witness myself, looked up to among men,
Doing noteworthy deeds: when here comes fate
Lifts me away, like feather skyward borne,
In one day! Riches then and glory,—whom
These are found constant to, I know not. Friends,
Farewell! the man who loved you all so much,
Now, this last time, my mates, ye look upon!

MEGARA.

Ha!
O father, do I see my dearest? Speak!

AMPHITRUON.

No more than thou canst, daughter—dumb like thee!

MEGARA.

Is this he whom we heard was under ground?

AMPHITRUON.

Unless at least some dream in day we see!

MEGARA.

What do I say? what dreams insanely view?
This is no other than thy son, old sire!
Here children! hang to these paternal robes,
Quick, haste, hold hard on him, since here 's your true
Zeus that can save—and every whit as well!

HERAKLES.

O hail, my palace, my hearth's propula,—
How glad I see thee as I come to light!

Ha, what means this? My children I behold
Before the house in garments of the grave,
Chapleted, and, amid a crowd of men,
My very wife—my father weeping too,
Whatever the misfortune! Come, best take
My station nearer these and learn it all!
Wife, what new sorrow has approached our home?

MEGARA.

O dearest! light flashed on thy father now!
Art thou come? art thou saved and dost thou fall
On friends in their supreme extremity?

HERAKLES.

How say'st thou? Father! what 's the trouble here?

MEGARA.

Undone are we!—but thou, old man, forgive
If first I snatch what thou shouldst say to him!
For somehow womanhood wakes pity more.
Here are my children killed and I undone!

HERAKLES.

Apollon, with what preludes speech begins!

MEGARA.

Dead are my brothers and old father too.

HERAKLES.

How say'st thou?—doing what?—by spear-stroke whence?

MEGARA.

Lukos destroyed them—the land's noble king!

HERAKLES.

Met them in arms? or through the land's disease?

MEGARA

Sedition: and he sways seven-gated Thebes.

HERAKLES.

Why then came fear on the old man and thee?

MEGARA.

He meant to kill thy father, me, our boys.

HERAKLES.

How say'st thou? Fearing what from orphanage?

MEGARA.

Lest they should some day pay back Kreon's death.

HERAKLES.

And why trick out the boys corpse-fashion thus?

MEGARA.

These wraps of death we have already donned.

HERAKLES.

And you had died through violence? Woe 's me!

MEGARA.

Left bare of friends: and thou wast dead, we heard.

HERAKLES.

And whence came on you this faintheartedness?

MEGARA.

The heralds of Eurustheus brought the news.

HERAKLES.

And why was it you left my house and hearth?

MEGARA.

Forced thence ; thy father—from his very couch !

HERAKLES.

And no shame at insulting the old man?

MEGARA.

Shame, truly ! no near neighbours *he* and Shame !

HERAKLES.

And so much, in my absence, lacked I friends?

MEGARA.

Friends,—are there any to a luckless man?

HERAKLES.

The Minuai-war I waged,—they spat forth these?

MEGARA.

Friendless,—again I tell thee,—is ill-luck.

HERAKLES.

Will not you cast these hell-wraps from your hair

And look on light again, and with your eyes
Taste the sweet change from nether dark to
day?
While I—for now there needs my handiwork—
First I shall go, demolish the abodes
Of these new lordships; next hew off the head
Accurst and toss it for the dogs to trail.
Then, such of the Kadmeians as I find
Were craven though they owed me gratitude,—
Some I intend to handle with this club
Renowned for conquest; and with winged shafts
Scatter the others, fill Ismenos full
With bloody corpses,—Dirké's flow so white
Shall be incarnadined. For, whom, I pray,
Behoves me rather help than wife and child
And aged father? Farewell, "Labours" mine!
Vainly I wrought them: my true work lay here!
My business is to die defending these,—
If for their father's sake they meant to die.
Or how shall we call brave the battling it
With snake and lion, as Eurustheus bade,
If yet I must not labour death away
From my own children? "Conquering Herakles"
Folk will not call me as they used, I think!
The right thing is for parents to assist
Children, old age, the partner of the couch.

AMPHITRUON.

True, son! thy duty is—be friend to friends
And foe to foes: yet—no more haste than needs!

HERAKLES.

Why, father, what is over hasty here?

AMPHITRUON.

Many a pauper,—seeming to be rich,
As the word goes,—the king calls partisan.
Such made a riot, ruined Thebes to rob
Their neighbour: for, what good they had at home
Was spent and gone—flew off through idleness.
You came to trouble Thebes, they saw: since seen,
Beware lest, raising foes, a multitude,
You stumble where you apprehend no harm.

HERAKLES.

If all Thebes saw me, not a whit care I.
But seeing as I did a certain bird
Not in the lucky seats, I knew some woe
Was fallen upon the house: so, purposely,
By stealth I made my way into the land.

AMPHITRUON.

And now, advancing, hail the hearth with praise
And give the ancestral home thine eye to see !
For he himself will come, thy wife and sons
To drag-forth—slaughter—slay me too,—this king !
But, here remaining, all succeeds with thee—
Gain lost by no false step. So, this thy town
Disturb not, son, ere thou right matters here !

HERAKLES.

Thus will I do, for thou say'st well ; my home
Let me first enter ! Since at the due time
Returning from the unsunned depths where dwells
Haides' wife Koré, let me not affront
Those gods beneath my roof I first should hail !

AMPHITRUON.

For didst thou really visit Haides, son ?

HERAKLES.

Ay—dragged to light, too, his three-headed beast.

AMPHITRUON.

By fight didst conquer, or through Koré's gift ?

HERAKLES.

Fight: well for me, I saw the Orgies first!

AMPHITRUON.

And is he in Eurustheus' house, the brute?

HERAKLES.

Chthonia's grove, Hermion's city, hold him now.

AMPHITRUON.

Does not Eurustheus know thee back on earth?

HERAKLES.

No: I would come first and see matters here.

AMPHITRUON.

But how wast thou below ground such a time?

HERAKLES.

I stopped, from Haides, bringing Theseus up.

AMPHITRUON.

And where is he?—bound o'er the plain for home?

HERAKLES.

Gone glad to Athens—Haides' fugitive!
But, up, boys! follow father into house!
There's a far better going-in for you
Truly, than going-out was! Nay, take heart,
And let the eyes no longer run and run!
And thou, O wife, my own, collect thy soul
Nor tremble now! Leave grasping, all of you,
My garments! I'm not winged, nor fly from friends
Ah,—
No letting go for these, who all the more
Hang to my garments! Did you foot indeed
The razor's edge? Why, then I'll carry them—
Take with my hands these small craft up, and tow
Just as a ship would. There! don't fear I shirk
My children's service! this way, men are men,
No difference! best and worst, they love their boys
After one fashion: wealth they differ in—
Some have it, others not; but each and all
Combine to form the children-loving race.

CHOROS.

Youth is a pleasant burthen to me;
But age on my head, more heavily

Than the crags of Aitna, weighs and weighs,
And darkening cloaks the lids and intercepts the rays.
Never be mine the preference
Of an Asian empire's wealth, nor yet
Of a house all gold, to youth, to youth
That 's beauty, whatever the gods dispense!
Whether in wealth we joy, or fret
Paupers,—of all God's gifts most beautiful, in truth!

But miserable murderous age I hate!
Let it go to wreck, the waves adown,
Nor ever by rights plague tower or town
Where mortals bide, but still elate
With wings, on ether, precipitate,
Wander them round—nor wait!

But if the gods, to man's degree,
Had wit and wisdom, they would bring
Mankind a twofold youth, to be
Their virtue's sign-mark, all should see,
In those with whom life's winter thus grew spring.
For when they died, into the sun once more
Would they have traversed twice life's racecourse o'er;
While ignobility had simply run

Existence through, nor second life begun.
And so might we discern both bad and good
As surely as the starry multitude
Is numbered by the sailors, one and one.
But now the gods by no apparent line
Limit the worthy and the base define;
Only, a certain period rounds, and so
Brings man more wealth,—but youthful vigour, no!

Well! I am not to pause
Mingling together—wine and wine in cup—
The Graces with the Muses up—
Most dulcet marriage: loosed from music's laws,
No life for me!
But where the wreaths abound, there ever may I be!
And still, an aged bard, I shout Mnemosuné—
Still chant of Herakles the triumph-chant,
Companioned by the seven-stringed tortoise-shell
And Libuan flute, and Bromios' self as well,
God of the grape, with man participant!
Not yet will we arrest their glad advance—
The Muses who so long have led me forth to dance!
A paian—hymn the Delian girls indeed,
Weaving a beauteous measure in and out
His temple-gates, Latona's goodly seed;
And paians—I too, these thy domes about,

From these grey cheeks, my king, will swan-like shout—
Old songster! Ay, in song it starts off brave—
"Zeus' son is he!" and yet, such grace of birth
Surpassing far, to man his labours gave
Existence, one calm flow without a wave,
Having destroyed the beasts, the terrors of the earth.

LUKOS.

From out the house Amphitruon comes—in time!
For 't is a long while now since ye bedecked
Your bodies with the dead-folk's finery.
But quick! the boys and wife of Herakles—
Bid them appear outside this house, keep pact
To die, and need no bidding but your own!

AMPHITRUON.

King! you press hard on me sore-pressed enough,
And give me scorn—beside my dead ones here.
Meet in such matters were it, though you reign,
To temper zeal with moderation. Since
You do impose on us the need to die—
Needs must we love our lot, obey your will.

LUKOS.

Where 's Megara, then? Alkmené's grandsons, where?

AMPHITRUON.

She, I think,—as one figures from outside,—

LUKOS.

Well, this same thinking,—what affords its ground?

AMPHITRUON.

—Sits suppliant on the holy altar-steps,—

LUKOS.

Idly indeed a suppliant to save life!

AMPHITRUON.

—And calls on her dead husband, vainly too!

LUKOS.

For he 's not come, nor ever will arrive.

AMPHITRUON.

Never—at least, if no god raise him up.

LUKOS.

Go to her, and conduct her from the house!

AMPHITRUON.

I should partake the murder, doing that.

LUKOS.

We,—since thou hast a scruple in the case,—
Outside of fears, we shall march forth these lads,
Mother and all. Here, follow me, my folk—
And gladly so remove what stops our toils!

AMPHITRUON.

Thou—go then! March where needs must! What remains—
Perhaps concerns another. Doing ill,
Expect some ill be done thee!
Ha, old friends!
On he strides beautifully! in the toils
O' the net, where swords spring forth, will he be fast—
Minded to kill his neighbours—the arch-knave!
I go, too—I must see the falling corpse!
For he has sweets to give—a dying man,
Your foe, that pays the price of deeds he did.

CHOROS.

Troubles are over! He the great king once
Turns the point, tends for Haides, goal of life!
O justice, and the gods' back-flowing fate!

AMPHITRUON.

Thou art come, late indeed, where death pays crime—
These insults heaped on better than thyself!

CHOROS.

Joy gives this outburst to my tears! Again
Come round those deeds, his doing, which of old
He never dreamed himself was to endure—
King of the country! But enough, old man!
Indoors, now, let us see how matters stand—
If somebody be faring as I wish!

LUKOS.

Ah me—me!

CHOROS.

This strikes the keynote—music to my mind,
Merry i' the household! Death takes up the tune!
The king gives voice, groans murder's prelude well!

LUKOS.

O, all the land of Kadmos! slain by guile!

CHOROS.

Ay, for who slew first? Paying back thy due,
Resign thee! make, for deeds done, mere amends!
Who was it grazed the gods through lawlessness—
Mortal himself, threw up his fool's-conceit
Against the blessed heavenly ones—as though
Gods had no power? Old friends, the impious man
Exists not any more! The house is mute.
Turn we to song and dance! For, those I love,
Those I wish well to, well fare they, to wish!

Dances, dances and banqueting
To Thebes, the sacred city through,
Are a care! for, change and change
Of tears to laughter, old to new,
Our lays, glad birth, they bring, they bring!
He is gone and past, the mighty king!
And the old one reigns, returned—O strange!
From the Acherontian harbour too!
Advent of hope, beyond thought's widest range!
To the gods, the gods, are crimes a care,
And they watch our virtue, well aware

That gold and that prosperity drive man
Out of his mind—those charioteers who hale
Might-without-right behind them: face who can
Fortune's reverse which time prepares, nor quail?
—He who evades law and in lawlessness
Delights him,—he has broken down his trust—
The chariot, riches haled—now blackening in the dust!

Ismenos, go thou garlanded!
Break into dance, ye ways, the polished bed
O' the seven-gated city! Dirké, thou
Fair-flowing, with the Asopiad sisters all,
Leave your sire's stream, attend the festival
Of Herakles, one choir of nymphs, sing triumph now!
O woody rock of Puthios and each home
O' the Helikonian Muses, ye shall come
With joyous shouting to my walls, my town
Where saw the light that Spartan race, those "Sown,"
Brazen-shield-bearing chiefs, whereof the band
With children's children renovates our land,
To Thebes a sacred light!
O combination of the marriage rite—
Bed of the mortal-born and Zeus, who couched
Beside the nymph of Perseus' progeny!
For credible, past hope, becomes to me
That nuptial story long ago avouched,

O Zeus! and time has turned the dark to bright,
And made one blaze of truth the Herakleidan might—
His, who emerged from earth's pavilion, left
Plouton's abode, the nether palace-cleft.
Thou wast the lord that nature gave me—not
That baseness born and bred—my king, by lot!
—Baseness made plain to all, who now regard
The match of sword with sword in fight,—
If to the gods the Just and Right
Still pleasing be, still claim the palm's award.

Horror!
Are we come to the self-same passion of fear,
Old friends?—such a phantasm fronts me here
Visible over the palace-roof!
In flight, in flight, the laggard limb
Bestir! and haste aloof
From that on the roof there—grand and grim!
O Paian, king!
Be thou my safeguard from the woeful thing!

IRIS.

Courage, old men! beholding here—Night's birth—
Madness, and me the handmaid of the gods,
Iris: since to your town we come, no plague—

Wage war against the house of but one man
From Zeus and from Alkmené sprung, they say.
Now, till he made an end of bitter toils,
Fate kept him safe, nor did his father Zeus
Let us once hurt him, Heré nor myself.
But, since he has toiled through Eurustheus' task,
Heré desires to fix fresh blood on him—
Slaying his children: I desire it too.

Up then, collecting the unsoftened heart,
Unwedded virgin of black Night! Drive, drag
Frenzy upon the man here—whirls of brain
Big with child-murder, while his feet leap gay!
Let go the bloody cable its whole length!
So that,—when o'er the Acherousian ford
He has sent floating, by self-homicide,
His beautiful boy-garland,—he may know
First, Heré's anger, what it is to him,
And then learn mine. The gods are vile indeed
And mortal matters vast, if he 'scape free!

MADNESS.

Certes, from well-born sire and mother too
Had I my birth, whose blood is Night's and Heaven's;
But here 's my glory,—not to grudge the good!

Nor love I raids against the friends of man.
I wish, then, to persuade,—before I see
You stumbling, you and Heré! trust my words!
This man, the house of whom ye hound me to,
Is not unfamed on earth nor gods among;
Since, having quelled waste land and savage sea,
He alone raised again the falling rights
Of gods—gone ruinous through impious men.
Desire no mighty mischief, I advise!

IRIS.

Give thou no thought to Heré's faulty schemes!

MADNESS.

Changing her step from faulty to fault-free!

IRIS.

Not to be wise, did Zeus' wife send thee here.

MADNESS.

Sun, thee I cite to witness—doing what I loathe to do!
But since indeed to Heré and thyself I must subserve,
And follow you quick, with a whizz, as the hounds a-hunt with the huntsman,

—Go I will! and neither the sea, as it groans with its waves so furiously,
Nor earthquake, no, nor the bolt of thunder gasping out heaven's labour-throe,
Shall cover the ground as I, at a bound, rush into the bosom of Herakles!
And home I scatter, and house I batter,
Having first of all made the children fall,—
And he who felled them is never to know
He gave birth to each child that received the blow,
Till the Madness, I am, have let him go!

Ha, behold! already he rocks his head—he is off from the starting-place!
Not a word, as he rolls his frightful orbs, from their sockets wrenched in the ghastly race!
And the breathings of him he tempers and times no more than a bull in act to toss,
And hideously he bellows invoking the Keres, daughters of Tartaros.
Ay, and I soon will dance thee madder, and pipe thee quite out of thy mind with fear!
So, up with the famous foot, thou Iris, march to Olumpos, leave me here!
Me and mine, who now combine, in the dreadful shape no mortal sees,

And now are about to pass, from without, inside of the home of Herakles!

CHOROS.

Ototototoi,—groan!
Away is mown
Thy flower, Zeus' offspring, City!
Unhappy Hellas, who dost cast (the pity!)
Who worked thee all the good,
Away from thee,—destroyest in a mood
Of madness him, to death whom pipings dance!
There goes she, in her chariot,—groans, her brood,—
And gives her team the goad, as though adrift
For doom, Night's Gorgon, Madness, she whose glance
Turns man to marble! with what hissings lift
Their hundred heads the snakes, her head's inheritance!
Quick has the god changed fortune: through their sire
Quick will the children, that he saved, expire!
O miserable me! O Zeus! thy child—
Childless himself—soon vengeance, hunger-wild,
Craving for punishment, will lay how low—
Loaded with many a woe!

O palace-roofs! your courts about,
A measure begins all unrejoiced
By the tympanies and the thyrsos hoist
Of the Bromian revel-rout!

O ye domes! and the measure proceeds
For blood, not such as the cluster bleeds
Of the Dionusian pouring-out!

Break forth, fly, children! fatal this—
Fatal the lay that is piped, I wis!
Ay, for he hunts a children-chase—
Never shall Madness lead her revel
And leave no trace in the dwelling-place!
Ai ai, because of the evil!
Ai ai, the old man—how I groan
For the father, and not the father alone!
She who was nurse of his children,—small
Her gain that they ever were born at all!

See! See!
A whirlwind shakes hither and thither
The house—the roof falls in together!
Ha, ha, what dost thou, son of Zeus?
A trouble of Tartaros broke loose,
Such as once Pallas on the Titan thundered,
Thou sendest on thy domes, roof-shattered
and wall-sundered!

MESSENGER.

O bodies white with age!—

CHOROS.

What cry, to me—
What, dost thou call with?

MESSENGER.

There 's a curse indoors.

CHOROS.

I shall not bring a prophet: you suffice.

MESSENGER.

Dead are the children.

CHOROS.

Ai ai!

MESSENGER.

Groan! for, groans
Suit well the subject. Dire the children's death,
Dire too the parent's hands that dealt the fate.
No one could tell worse woe than we have borne.

CHOROS.

How dost thou that same curse—curse, cause for groan—

The father's on the children, make appear?
Tell in what matter they were hurled from heaven
Against the house—these evils; and recount
The children's hapless fate, O Messenger!

MESSENGER.

The victims were before the hearth of Zeus,
A household-expiation: since the king
O' the country, Herakles had killed and cast
From out the dwelling; and a beauteous choir
Of boys stood by his sire, too, and his wife.
And now the basket had been carried round
The altar in a circle, and we used
The consecrated speech. Alkmené's son,—
Just as he was about, in his right hand,
To bear the torch, that he might dip into
The cleansing-water,—came to a stand-still;
And, as their father yet delayed, his boys
Had their eyes on him. But he was himself
No longer: lost in rollings of the eyes;
Outthrusting eyes—their very roots—like blood!
Froth he dropped down his bushy-bearded cheek,
And said—together with a madman's laugh—
"Father! why sacrifice, before I slay
Eurustheus? why have twice the lustral fire,

And double pains, when 't is permitted me
To end, with one good hand-sweep, matters here?
Then,—when I hither bring Eurustheus' head,—
Then for these just slain, wash hands once for all!
Now,—cast drink-offerings forth, throw baskets down!
Who gives me bow and arrows, who my club?
I go to that Mukenai. One must match
Crowbars and mattocks, so that—those sunk stones
The Kuklops squared with picks and plumb-line red—
I, with my bent steel, may o'ertumble town."
Which said, he goes and—with no car to have—
Affirms he has one! mounts the chariot-board,
And strikes, as having really goad in hand!
And two ways laughed the servants—laugh with awe;
And one said, as each met the other's stare,
"Playing us boys' tricks? or is master mad?"
But up he climbs, and down along the roof,
And, dropping into the men's place, maintains
He 's come to Nisos city, when he 's come
Only inside his own house! then reclines
On floor, for couch, and, as arrived indeed,
Makes himself supper; goes through some brief stay
Then says he 's traversing the forest-flats
Of Isthmos; thereupon lays body bare
Of bucklings, and begins a contest with
—No one! and is proclaimed the conqueror—

He by himself—having called out to hear
—Nobody! Then, if you will take his word,
Blaring against Eurustheus horribly,
He 's at Mukenai. But his father laid
Hold of the strong hand and addressed him thus:
"O son, what ails thee? Of what sort is this
Extravagance? Has not some murder-craze,
Bred of those corpses thou didst just despatch,
Danced thee drunk?" But he,—taking him to crouch,
Eurustheus' sire, that apprehensive touched
His hand, a suppliant,—pushes him aside,
Gets ready quiver, and bends bow against
His children—thinking them Eurustheus' boys
He means to slay. They, horrified with fear,
Rushed here and there,—this child, into the robes
O' the wretched mother—this, beneath the shade
O' the column,—and this other, like a bird,
Cowered at the altar foot. The mother shrieks
"Parent—what dost thou?—kill thy children?" So
Shriek the old sire and crowd of servitors.
But he, outwinding him, as round about
The column ran the boy,—a horrid whirl
O' the lathe his foot described!—stands opposite,
Strikes through the liver; and supine the boy
Bedews the stone shafts, breathing out his life.

But "Victory!" he shouted—boasted thus:
"Well, this one nestling of Eurustheus—dead—
Falls by me, pays back the paternal hate!"
Then bends bow on another who was crouched
At base of altar—overlooked, he thought—
And now prevents him, falls at father's knee,
Throwing up hand to beard and cheek above.
"O dearest!" cries he; "father, kill me not!
Yours I am—your boy: not Eurustheus' boy
You kill now!" But he, rolling the wild eye
Of Gorgon,—as the boy stood all too close
For deadly bowshot,—mimicry of smith
Who batters red-hot iron,—hand o'er head
Heaving his club, on the boy's yellow hair
Hurls it and breaks the bone. This second caught,—
He goes, would slay the third, one sacrifice
He and the couple; but, beforehand here,
The miserable mother catches up,
Carries him inside house and bars the gate.
Then he, as he were at those Kuklops' work,
Digs at, heaves doors up, wrenches doorposts out,
Lays wife and child low with the selfsame shaft.
And this done, at the old man's death he drives;
But there came, as it seemed to us who saw,
A statue—Pallas with the crested head,
Swinging her spear—and threw a stone which smote

Herakles' breast and stayed his slaughter-rage,
And sent him safe to sleep. He falls to ground—
Striking against the column with his back—
Column which, with the falling of the roof,
Broken in two, lay by the altar-base.
And we, foot-free now from our several flights,
Along with the old man, we fastened bonds
Of rope-noose to the column, so that he,
Ceasing from sleep, might not go adding deeds
To deeds done. And he sleeps a sleep, poor wretch,
No gift of any god! since he has slain
Children and wife. For me, I do not know
What mortal has more misery to bear.

CHOROS.

A murder there was which Argolis
Holds in remembrance, Hellas through,
As, at that time, best and famousest:
Of those, the daughters of Danaos slew.
A murder indeed was that! but this
Outstrips it, straight to the goal has pressed.
I am able to speak of a murder done
To the hapless Zeus-born offspring, too—
Prokné's son, who had but one—

Or a sacrifice to the Muses, say
Rather, who Itus sing alway,
Her single child. But thou, the sire
Of children three – O thou consuming fire!—
In one outrageous fate hast made them all expire.
And this outrageous fate—
What groan, or wail, or deadmen's dirge,
Or choric dance of Haides shall I urge
The Muse to celebrate?

Woe! woe! behold!
The portalled palace lies unrolled,
This way and that way, each prodigious fold!
Alas for me! these children, see,
Stretched, hapless group, before their father—he
The all-unhappy, who lies sleeping out
The murder of his sons, a dreadful sleep!
And bonds, see, all about,—
Rope-tangle, ties and tether,—these
Tightenings around the body of Herakles
To the stone columns of the house made fast!

But—like a bird that grieves
For callow nestlings some rude hand bereaves—
See, here, a bitter journey overpast,
The old man—all too late—is here at last!

AMPHITRUON.

Silently, silently, aged Kadmeians!
Will ye not suffer my son, diffused
Yonder, to slide from his sorrows in sleep?

CHOROS.

And thee, old man, do I, groaning, weep,
And the children too, and the head there— used
Of old to the wreaths and paians!

AMPHITRUON.

Farther away! Nor beat the breast,
Nor wail aloud, nor rouse from rest
The slumberer—asleep, so best!

CHOROS.

Ah me—what a slaughter!

AMPHITRUON.

Refrain—refrain!
Ye will prove my perdition.

CHOROS.

Unlike water,
Bloodshed rises from earth again.

AMPHITRUON.

Do I bid you bate your breath, in vain—
Ye elders? Lament in a softer strain!
Lest he rouse himself, burst every chain,
And bury the city in ravage—bray
Father and house to dust away!

CHOROS.

I cannot forbear—I cannot forbear!

AMPHITRUON.

Hush! I will learn his breathings: there!
I will lay my ears close.

CHOROS.

What, he sleeps?

AMPHITRUON.

Ay,—sleeps! A horror of slumber keeps
The man who has piled
On wife and child
Death and death, as he shot them down
With clang o' the bow.

CHOROS.

Wail—

AMPHITRUON.

Even so!

CHOROS.

—The fate of the children—

AMPHITRUON.

Triple woe

CHOROS.

—Old man, the fate of thy son!

AMPHITRUON.

Hush, hush! Have done!
He is turning about!
He is breaking out!
Away! I steal
And my body conceal,
Before he arouse,
In the depths of the house.

CHOROS.

Courage! The Night

Maintains her right
On the lids of thy son there, sealed from sight!

AMPHITRUON.

See, see! To leave the light
And, wretch that I am, bear one last ill,
I do not avoid; but if he kill
Me his own father, and devise
Beyond the present miseries
A misery more ghastly still—
And to haunt him, over and above
Those here who, as they used to love,
Now hate him, what if he have with these
My murder, the worst of Erinues?

CHOROS.

Then was the time to die, for thee,
When ready to wreak in the full degree
Vengeance on those
Thy consort's foes
Who murdered her brothers! glad, life's close,
With the Taphioi down,
And sacked their town
Clustered about with a wash of sea!

AMPHITRUON.

To flight—to flight !
Away from the house, troop off, old men !
Save yourselves out of the maniac's sight !
He is rousing himself right up : and then,
Murder on murder heaping anew,
He will revel in blood your city through !

CHOROS.

O Zeus, why hast, with such unmeasured hate,
Hated thy son, whelmed in this sea of woes ?

HERAKLES.

Ha,—
In breath indeed I am—see things I ought—
Æther, and earth, and these the sunbeam-shafts !
But then—some billow and strange whirl of sense
I have fallen into ! and breathings hot I breathe —
Smoked upwards, not the steady work from lungs.
See now ! Why bound,—at moorings like a ship,—
About my young breast and young arm, to this
Stone piece of carved work broke in half, do I
Sit, have my rest in corpses' neighbourhood ?
Strewn on the ground are winged darts, and bow
Which played my brother-shieldman, held in hand,—

Guarded my side, and got my guardianship!
I cannot have gone back to Haides—twice
Begun Eurustheus' race I ended thence?
But I nor see the Sisupheian stone,
Nor Plouton, nor Demeter's sceptred maid!
I am struck witless sure! Where can I be?
Ho there! what friend of mine is near or far—
Some one to cure me of bewilderment?
For nought familiar do I recognize.

AMPHITRUON.

Old friends, shall I go close to these my woes?

CHOROS.

Ay, and let me too,—nor desert your ills!

HERAKLES.

Father, why weepest thou, and buriest up
Thine eyes, aloof so from thy much-loved son?

AMPHITRUON.

O child!—for, faring badly, mine thou art!

HERAKLES.

Do I fare somehow ill, that tears should flow?

AMPHITRUON.

Ill,—would cause any god who bore, to groan!

HERAKLES.

That 's boasting, truly! still, you state no hap.

AMPHITRUON.

For, thyself seest—if in thy wits again.

HERAKLES.

Heyday! How riddlingly that hint returns!

AMPHITRUON.

Well, I am trying—art thou sane and sound!

HERAKLES.

Say if thou lay'st aught strange to my life's charge!

AMPHITRUON.

If thou no more art Haides-drunk,—I tell!

HERAKLES.

I bring to mind no drunkenness of soul.

AMPHITRUON.

Shall I unbind my son, old men, or what?

HERAKLES.

And who was binder, tell!—not *that*, my deed!

AMPHITRUON.

Mind that much of misfortune—pass the rest!

HERAKLES.

Enough! from silence, I nor learn nor wish.

AMPHITRUON.

O Zeus, dost witness here throned Heré's work?

HERAKLES.

But have I had to bear aught hostile thence?

AMPHITRUON.

Let be the goddess—bury thine own guilt!

HERAKLES.

Undone! What is the sorrow thou wilt say?

AMPHITRUON.

Look! See the ruins of thy children here!

HERAKLES.

Ah me! What sight do wretched I behold?

AMPHITRUON.

Unfair fight, son, this fight thou fastenedst
On thine own children!

HERAKLES.

What fight? Who slew these?

AMPHITRUON.

Thou and thy bow, and who of gods was cause.

HERAKLES.

How say'st? What did I? Ill-announcing sire!

AMPHITRUON.

—Go mad! Thou askest a sad clearing up.

HERAKLES.

And am I also murderer of my wife?

AMPHITRUON.

All the work here was just one hand's work—thine!

HERAKLES.

Ai ai—for groans encompass me—a cloud!

AMPHITRUON.

For these deeds' sake do I begroan thy fate.

HERAKLES.

Did I break up my house or dance it down?

AMPHITRUON.

I know just one thing—all 's a woe with thee.

HERAKLES.

But where did the craze catch me? where destroy?

AMPHITRUON.

When thou didst cleanse hands at the altar-flame.

HERAKLES.

Ah me! why is it then I save my life—
Proved murderer of my dearest ones, my boys?

Shall not I rush to the rock-level's leap,
Or, darting sword through breast and all, become
My children's blood-avenger? or, this flesh
Burning away with fire, so thrust away
The infamy, which waits me there, from life?

Ah but,—a hindrance to my purposed death,
Theseus arrives, my friend and kinsman, here!
Eyes will be on me! my child-murder-plague
In evidence before friends loved so much!
O me, what shall I do? Where, taking wing
Or gliding underground, shall I seek out
A solitariness from misery?
I will pull night upon my muffled head!
Let this wretch here content him with his curse
Of blood: I would pollute no innocents.

THESEUS.

I come,—with others who await beside
Asopos' stream, the armed Athenian youth,—
Bring thy son, old man, spear's fight-fellowship!
For a bruit reached the Erechtheidai's town
That, having seized the sceptre of this realm,
Lukos prepares you battle-violence.
So, paying good back,—Herakles began,

Saving me down there,—I have come, old man,
If aught, of my hand or my friends', you want.
What 's here? Why all these corpses on the ground?
Am I perhaps behindhand—come too late
For newer ill? Who killed these children now?
Whose wife was she, this woman I behold?
Boys, at least, take no stand in reach of spear!
Some other woe than war, I chance upon.

AMPHITRUON.

O thou, who sway'st the olive-bearing height!—

THESEUS.

Why hail'st thou me with woeful prelude thus?

AMPHITRUON.

Dire sufferings have we suffered from the gods.

HESEUS.

These boys,—who are they thou art weeping o'er?

AMPHITRUON.

He gave them birth, indeed, my hapless son!
Begot, but killed them—dared their bloody death.

THESEUS.

Speak no such horror!

AMPHITRUON.

Would I might obey!

THESEUS.

O teller of dread tidings!

AMPHITRUON.

Lost are we—

Lost—flown away from life!

THESEUS.

What sayest thou?

What did he?

AMPHITRUON.

Erring through a frenzy-fit,
He did all, with the arrows dipt in dye
Of hundred-headed Hudra.

THESEUS.

Heré's strife!

But who is this among the dead, old man?

AMPHITRUON.

Mine, mine, this progeny—the labour-plagued,
Who went with gods once to Phlegruia's plain,
And in the giant-slaying war bore shield.

THESEUS.

Woe—woe! What man was born mischanceful thus!

AMPHITRUON.

Thou couldst not know another mortal man
Toil-weary, more outworn by wanderings.

THESEUS.

And why i' the peploi hides he his sad head?

AMPHITRUON.

Not daring meet thine eye, thy friendliness
And kinship,—nor that children's-blood about.

THESEUS.

But *I* come to who shared my woe with me!
Uncover him!

AMPHITRUON.

O child, put from thine eyes

The peplos, throw it off, show face to sun!
Woe's weight well matched contends with tears in thee.
I supplicate thee, falling at thy cheek
And knee and hand, and shedding this old tear!
O son, remit the savage lion's mood,
Since to a bloody, an unholy race
Art thou led forth, if thou be resolute
To go on adding ill to ill, my child!

THESEUS.

Let me speak! Thee, who sittest—seated woe—
I call upon to show thy friends thine eye!
For there 's no darkness has a cloud so black
May hide thy misery thus absolute.
Why, waving hand, dost sign me—murder 's done?
Lest a pollution strike me, from thy speech?
Nought care I to—with thee, at least—fare ill:
For I had joy once! *Then*,—soul rises to,—
When thou didst save me from the dead to light!
Friends' gratitude that tastes old age, I loathe,
And him who likes to share when things look fine,
But, sail along with friends in trouble—no!
Arise, uncover thine unhappy head!
Look on us! Every man of the right race
Bears what, at least, the gods inflict, nor shrinks.

HERAKLES.

Theseus, hast seen this match—my boys with me?

THESEUS.

I heard of, now I see the ills thou sign'st.

HERAKLES.

Why then hast thou displayed my head to sun?

THESEUS.

Why? mortals bring no plague on aught divine.

HERAKLES.

Fly, O unhappy, this my impious plague!

THESEUS.

No plague of vengeance flits to friends from friends.

HERAKLES.

I praise thee. But I helped thee,—that is truth.

THESEUS.

And I, advantaged then, now pity thee.

HERAKLES.

—The pitiable,—my children's murderer!

THESEUS.

I mourn for thy sake, in this altered lot.

HERAKLES.

Hast thou found others in still greater woe?

THESEUS.

Thou, from earth, touchest heaven, one huge distress!

HERAKLES.

Accordingly, I am prepared to die.

THESEUS.

Think'st thou thy threats at all import the gods?

HERAKLES.

Gods please themselves: to gods I give their like.

THESEUS.

Shut thy mouth, lest big words bring bigger woe!

HERAKLES.

I am full fraught with ills—no stowing more!

THESEUS.

Thou wilt do—what, then? Whither moody borne?

HERAKLES.

Dying, I go below earth whence I came.

THESEUS.

Thou hast used words of—what man turns up first!

HERAKLES.

While thou, being outside sorrow, schoolest me.

THESEUS.

The much-enduring Herakles talks thus?—

HERAKLES.

Not the so much-enduring: measure 's past.

THESEUS.

—Mainstay to mortals, and their mighty friend?

HERAKLES.

They nowise profit me: but Heré rules.

THESEUS.

Hellas forbids thou shouldst ineptly die.

HERAKLES.

But hear, then, how I strive by arguments
Against thy teachings! I will ope thee out
My life—past, present—as unliveable.
First, I was born of this man, who had slain
His mother's aged sire, and, sullied so,
Married Alkmené, she who gave me birth.
Now, when the basis of a family
Is not laid right, what follows needs must fall;
And Zeus, whoever Zeus is, formed me foe
To Heré (take not thou offence, old man!
Since father, in Zeus' stead, account I thee),
And, while I was at suck yet, frightful snakes
She introduced among my swaddling-clothes,—
That bedfellow of Zeus!—to end me so.
But when I gained the youthful garb of flesh,
The labours I endured—what need to tell?
What lions ever, or three-bodied brutes,
'Tuphons or giants, or the four-legg'd swarms

Of Kentaur-battle, did not I end out?
And that hound, headed all about with heads
Which cropped up twice, the Hudra, having slain—
I both went through a myriad other toils
In full drove, and arrived among the dead
To convoy, as Eurustheus bade, to light
Haides' three-headed dog and doorkeeper.
But then I,—wretch,—dared this last labour—see!
Slew my sons, keystone-coped my house with ills.
To such a strait I come! nor my dear Thebes
Dare I inhabit: and, suppose I stay?
Into what fane or festival of friends
Am I to go? My curse scarce courts accost!
Shall I seek Argos? How, if fled from home?
But say—I hurry to some other town!
And there they eye me, as notorious now,—
Kept by sharp tongue-taunts under lock and key—
"Is not this he, Zeus' son, who murdered once
Children and wife? Let him go rot elsewhere!"
To any man renowned as happy once,
Reverses are a grave thing; but to whom
Evil is old acquaintance there 's no hurt
To speak of, he and misery are twins.
To this degree of woe I think to come:
For earth will utter voice forbidding me
To touch the ground, and sea—to pierce the wave,

The river-springs—to drink, and I shall play
Ixion's part quite out, the chained and wheeled!
And best of all will be, if so I 'scape
Sight from one man of those Hellenes,—once
I lived among, felicitous and rich!
Why ought I then to live? What gain accrues
From good-for-nothing, wicked life I lead?
In fine, let Zeus' brave consort dance and sing,
Stamp foot, the Olumpian Zeus' own sandal-trick!
What she has willed, that brings her will to pass—
The foremost man of Hellas pedestalled,
Up, over, and down whirling! Who would pray
To such a goddess?—that, begrudging Zeus
Because he loved a woman, ruins me—
Lover of Hellas, faultless of the wrong!

THESEUS.

This strife is from no other of the gods
Than Zeus' wife; rightly apprehend, as well,
Why, to no death—thou meditatest now—
I would persuade thee, but to bear thy woes!
None, none of mortals boasts a fate unmixed,
Nor gods—if poets' teaching be not false.
Have not they joined in wedlock against law
With one another? not, for sake of rule,
Branded their sires in bondage? Yet they house,

All the same, in Olumpos, carry heads
High there, notorious sinners though they be!
What wilt thou say, then, if thou, mortal-born,
Bearest outrageously fate gods endure?
Leave Thebes, now, pay obedience to the law
And follow me to Pallas' citadel!
There, when thy hands are purified from stain,
House will I give thee, and goods shared alike.
What gifts I hold too from the citizens
For saving twice seven children, when I slew
The Knosian bull, these also give I thee.
And everywhere about the land are plots
Apportioned me: these, named by thine own name,
Shall be henceforward styled by all men—thine,
Thy life long; but at death, when Haides-bound,
All Athens shall uphold the honoured one
With sacrifices, and huge marble heaps:
For that 's a fair crown our Hellenes grant
Their people—glory, should they help the brave!
And I repay thee back this grace for thine
That saved me, now that thou art lorn of friends—
Since, when the gods give honour, friends may flit:
For, a god's help suffices, if he please.

HERAKLES

Ah me, these words are foreign to my woes!

I neither fancy gods love lawless beds,
Nor, that with chains they bind each other's hands.
Have I judged worthy faith, at any time;
Nor shall I be persuaded—one is born
His fellows' master! since God stands in need—
If he is really God—of nought at all.
These are the poets' pitiful conceits!
But this it was I pondered, though woe-whelmed—
"Take heed lest thou be taxed with cowardice
Somehow in leaving thus the light of day!"
For whoso cannot make a stand against
These same misfortunes, neither could withstand
A mere man's dart, oppose death, strength to strength.
Therefore unto thy city I will go
And have the grace of thy ten thousand gifts.
There! I have tasted of ten thousand toils
As truly—never waived a single one,
Nor let these runnings drop from out my eyes:
Nor ever thought it would have come to this—
That I from out my eyes do drop tears. Well!
At present, as it seems, one bows to fate.
So be it! Old man, thou seest my exile—
Seest, too, me—my children's murderer!
These give thou to the tomb, and deck the dead,
Doing them honour with thy tears—since me
Law does not sanction. Propping on her breast,

And giving them into their mother's arms,
—Re-institute the sad community
Which I, unhappy, brought to nothingness—
Not by my will! And, when earth hides the dead,
Live in this city!—sad, but, all the same,
Force thy soul to bear woe along with me!
O children, who begat and gave you birth—
Your father—has destroyed you! nought you gain
By those fair deeds of mine I laid you up,
As by main-force I laboured glory out
To give you,—that fine gift of fatherhood!
And thee, too, O my poor one, I destroyed,
Not rendering like for like, as when thou kept'st
My marriage-bed inviolate,—those long
Household-seclusions draining to the dregs
Inside my house! O me, my wife, my boys—
And—O myself, how, miserably moved,
Am I disyoked now from both boys and wife!
O bitter those delights of kisses now—
And bitter these my weapons' fellowship!
For I am doubtful whether shall I keep
Or cast away these arrows which will clang
Ever such words out, as they knock my side—
"Us—thou didst murder wife and children with!
Us—child-destroyers—still thou keepest thine!"
Ha, shall I bear them in my arms, then? What

Say for excuse? Yet, naked of my darts
Wherewith I did my bravest, Hellas through,
Throwing myself beneath foot to my foes,
Shall I die basely? No! relinquishment
Of these must never be,—companions once.
We sorrowfully must observe the pact.
In just one thing, co-operate with me
Thy sad friend, Theseus! Go along with him
To Argos, and in concert get arranged
The price my due for bringing there the Hound!
O land of Kadmos, Theban people all,
Shear off your locks, lament one wide lament,
Go to my children's grave and, in one strain,
Lament the whole of us—my dead and me—
Since all together are fordone and lost,
Smitten by Heré's single stroke of fate!

THESEUS.

Rise up now from thy dead ones! Tears enough,
Poor friend!

HERAKLES.

I cannot: for my limbs are fixed.

THESEUS.

Ay: even these strong men fate overthrows.

HERAKLES.

Woe!
Here might I grow a stone, nor mind woes more!

THESEUS.

Cease! Give thy hand to friendly helpmate now!

HERAKLES.

Nay, but I wipe off blood upon thy robes.

THESEUS.

Squeeze out and spare no drop! I take it all!

HERAKLES.

Of sons bereaved, I have thee like my son.

THESEUS.

Give to my neck thy hand! 't is I will lead.

HERAKLES.

Yoke-fellows friendly—one heart-broken, though!
O father, such a man we need for friend!

AMPHITRUON.

Certes the land that bred him boasts good sons.

HERAKLES.

Turn me round, Theseus—to behold my boys!

THESEUS.

What? will the having such a love-charm soothe?

HERAKLES.

I want it; and to press my father's breast.

AMPHITRUON.

See here, O son! for, what I love thou seek'st.

THESEUS.

Strange! Of thy labours no more memory?

HERAKLES.

All those were less than these, those ills I bore.

THESEUS.

Who sees thee grow a woman,—will not praise

HERAKLES.

I live low to thee? Not so once, I think.

THESEUS.

Too low by far! "Famed Herakles"—where 's he?

HERAKLES.

Down amid evils, of what kind wast *thou*?

THESEUS.

As far as courage—least of all mankind!

HERAKLES.

How say'st, then, *I* in evils shrink to nought?

THESEUS.

Forward!

HERAKLES.

Farewell, old father!

AMPHITRUON.

Thou too, son!

HERAKLES.

Bury the boys as I enjoined!

AMPHITRUON.

And *me*—

Who will be found to bury now, my child?

HERAKLES.

Myself.

AMPHITRUON.

When, coming?

HERAKLES.

When thy task is done.

AMPHITRUON.

How?

HERAKLES.

I will have thee carried forth from Thebes
To Athens. But bear in the children, earth
Is burthened by! Myself,—who with these shames
Have cast away my house,—a ruined hulk,
I follow—trailed by Theseus—on my way;
And whoso rather would have wealth and strength
Than good friends, reasons foolishly therein.

CHOROS.

And we depart, with sorrow at heart,
Sobs that increase with tears that start;
The greatest of all our friends of yore
We have lost for evermore!

When the long silence ended, —"Our best friend—
Lost, our best friend!" he muttered musingly.
Then, "Lachares the sculptor" (half aloud)
"Sinned he or sinned he not? 'Outrageous sin!'
Shuddered our elders, 'Pallas should be clothed:
He carved her naked.' 'But more beautiful!'
Answers this generation: 'Wisdom formed
For love not fear!' And there the statue stands,
Entraps the eye severer art repels.
Moreover, Pallas wields the thunderbolt
Yet has not struck the artist all this while.
Pheidias and Aischulos? Euripides
And Lachares? But youth will have its way.
The ripe man ought to be as old as young—
As young as old. I too have youth at need.
Much may be said for stripping wisdom bare.

"And who 's 'our best friend'? You play kottabos;
Here 's the last mode of playing. Take a sphere
With orifices at due interval,
Through topmost one of which, a throw adroit
Sends wine from cup, clean passage, from outside
To where, in hollow midst, a manikin
Suspended ever bobs with head erect
Right underneath whatever hole 's a-top
When you set orb a-rolling: plumb, he gets

Ever this benediction of the splash.
An other-fashioned orb presents him fixed:
Of all the outlets, he fronts only one,
And only when that one,—and rare the chance,—
Comes uppermost, does he turn upward too:
He can't turn all sides with the turning orb.
Inside this sphere of life,—all objects, sense
And soul perceive,—Euripides hangs fixed,
Gets knowledge through the single aperture
Of High and Right: with visage fronting these
He waits the wine thence ere he operate,
Work in the world and write a tragedy.
When that hole happens to revolve to point,
In drops the knowledge, waiting meets reward.
But, duly in rotation, Low and Wrong—
When these enjoy the moment's altitude,
His heels are found just where his head should be!
No knowledge that way! *I* am moveable,—
To slightest shift of orb make prompt response,
Face Low and Wrong and Weak and all the rest,
And still drink knowledge, wine-drenched every turn,—
Equally favoured by their opposites.
Little and Bad exist, are natural:
Then let me know them, and be twice as great
As he who only knows one phase of life!
So doubly shall I prove 'best friend of man,'

If I report the whole truth—Vice, perceived
While he shut eyes to all but Virtue there.
Man 's made of both: and both must be of use
To somebody: if not to him, to me.
While, as to your imaginary Third
Who, stationed (by mechanics past my guess)
So as to take in every side at once,
And not successively,—may reconcile
The High and Low in tragi-comic verse,—
He shall be hailed superior to us both
When born—in the Tin-islands! Meantime, here
In bright Athenai, I contest the claim,
Call myself Iostephanos' 'best friend,'
Who took my own course, worked as I descried
Ordainment, stuck to my first faculty.

"For listen! There 's no failure breaks the heart,
Whate'er be man's endeavour in this world,
Like the rash poet's when he—nowise fails
By poetizing badly,—Zeus or makes
Or mars a man, so—at it, merrily!
But when,—made man,—much like myself,—equipt
For such and such achievement,—rash he turns
Out of the straight path, bent on snatch of feat
From—who 's the appointed fellow born thereto,—
Crows take him!—in your Kassiterides?

Half-doing his work, leaving mine untouched,
That were the failure. Here I stand, heart-whole,
No Thamuris!

"Well thought of, Thamuris!
Has zeal, pray, for 'best friend' Euripides
Allowed you to observe the honour done
His elder rival, in our Poikilé?
You don't know? Once and only once, trod stage,
Sang and touched lyre in person, in his youth,
Our Sophokles,—youth, beauty, dedicate
To Thamuris who named the tragedy.
The voice of him was weak; face, limbs and lyre,
These were worth saving: Thamuris stands yet
Perfect as painting helps in such a case.
At least you know the story, for 'best friend'
Enriched his 'Rhesos' from the Blind Bard's store;
So haste and see the work, and lay to heart
What it was struck me when I eyed the piece!
Here stands a poet punished for rash strife
With Powers above his power, who see with sight
Beyond his vision, sing accordingly
A song, which he must needs dare emulate.
Poet, remain the man nor ape the Muse!

"But—lend me the psalterion! Nay, for once—

Once let my hand fall where the other's lay!
I see it, just as I were Sophokles,
That sunrise and combustion of the east!"

And then he sang—are these unlike the words?

Thamuris marching,—lyre and song of Thrace—
(Perpend the first, the worst of woes that were
Allotted lyre and song, ye poet-race!)

Thamuris from Oichalia, feasted there
By kingly Eurutos of late, now bound
For Dorion at the uprise broad and bare

Of Mount Pangaios (ore with earth enwound
Glittered beneath his footstep)—marching gay
And glad, Thessalia through, came, robed and crowned

From triumph on to triumph, mid a ray
Of early morn,—came, saw and knew the spot
Assigned him for his worst of woes, that day.

Balura—happier while its name was not—
Met him, but nowise menaced; slipt aside,
Obsequious river to pursue its lot

Of solacing the valley—say, some wide
Thick busy human cluster, house and home,
Embanked for peace, or thrift that thanks the tide.

Thamuris, marching, laughed "Each flake of foam"
(As sparklingly the ripple raced him by)
"Mocks slower clouds adrift in the blue dome!"

For Autumn was the season; red the sky
Held morn's conclusive signet of the sun
To break the mists up, bid them blaze and die.

Morn had the mastery as, one by one
All pomps produced themselves along the tract
From earth's far ending to near heaven begun.

Was there a ravaged tree? it laughed compact
With gold, a leaf-ball crisp, high-brandished now,
Tempting to onset frost which late attacked.

Was there a wizened shrub, a starveling bough,
A fleecy thistle filched from by the wind,
A weed, Pan's trampling hoof would disallow?

Each, with a glory and a rapture twined
About it, joined the rush of air and light
And force: the world was of one joyous mind

Say not the birds flew! they forebore their right—
Swam, revelling onward in the roll of things.
Say not the beasts' mirth bounded! that was flight—

How could the creatures leap, no lift of wings?
Such earth's community of purpose, such
The ease of earth's fulfilled imaginings,—

So did the near and far appear to touch
I' the moment's transport,—that an interchange
Of function, far with near, seemed scarce too much;

And had the rooted plant aspired to range
With the snake's license, while the insect yearned
To glow fixed as the flower, it were not strange—

No more than if the fluttery tree-top turned
To actual music, sang itself aloft;
Or if the wind, impassioned chantress, earned

The right to soar embodied in some soft
Fine form all fit for cloud-companionship,
And, blissful, once touch beauty chased so oft.

Thamuris, marching, let no fancy slip
Born of the fiery transport; lyre and song
Were his, to smite with hand and launch from lip—

Peerless recorded, since the list grew long
Of poets (saith Homeros) free to stand
Pedestalled mid the Muses' temple-throng,

A statued service, laurelled, lyre in hand,
(Ay, for we see them)—Thamuris of Thrace
Predominating foremost of the band.

Therefore the morn-ray that enriched his face,
If it gave lambent chill, took flame again
From flush of pride; he saw, he knew the place.

What wind arrived with all the rhythms from plain,
Hill, dale, and that rough wildwood interspersed?
Compounding these to one consummate strain,

It reached him, music; but his own outburst
Of victory concluded the account,
And that grew song which was mere music erst.

"Be my Parnassos, thou Pangaian mount!
And turn thee, river, nameless hitherto!
Famed shalt thou vie with famed Pieria's fount!

"Here I await the end of this ado:
Which wins—Earth's poet or the Heavenly Muse." . . .

But song broke up in laughter. "Tell the rest
Who may! *I* have not spurned the common life,
Nor vaunted mine a lyre to match the Muse
Who sings for gods, not men! Accordingly,
I shall not decorate her vestibule—
Mute marble, blind the eyes and quenched the brain,
Loose in the hand a bright, a broken lyre!
—Not Thamuris but Aristophanes!

"There! I have sung content back to myself,
And started subject for a play beside.
My next performance shall content you both.
Did 'Prelude-Battle' maul 'best friend' too much?
Then 'Main-Fight' be my next song, fairness' self!
Its subject—Contest for the Tragic Crown.
Ay, you shall hear none else but Aischulos
Lay down the law of Tragedy, and prove
'Best friend' a stray-away,—no praise denied
His manifold deservings, never fear—
Nor word more of the old fun! Death defends.
Sound admonition has its due effect.
Oh, you have uttered weighty words, believe!
Such as shall bear abundant fruit, next year,
In judgment, regular, legitimate.
Let Bacchos' self preside in person! Ay—
For there 's a buzz about those 'Bacchanals'

Rumour attributes to your great and dead
For final effort: just the prodigy
Great dead men leave, to lay survivors low!
—Until we make acquaintance with our fate
And find, fate's worst done, we, the same, survive
Perchance to honour more the patron-god,
Fitlier inaugurate a festal year.
Now that the cloud has broken, sky laughs blue,
Earth blossoms youthfully. Athenai breathes.
After a twenty-six years' wintry blank
Struck from her life,—war-madness, one long swoon,
She wakes up: Arginousai bids good cheer.
We have disposed of Kallikratidas;
Once more will Sparté sue for terms,—who knows?
Cede Dekeleia, as the rumour runs:
Terms which Athenai, of right mind again,
Accepts—she can no other. Peace declared,
Have my long labours borne their fruit or no?
Grinned coarse buffoonery so oft in vain?
Enough—it simply saved you. Saved ones, praise
Theoria's beauty and Opora's breadth!
Nor, when Peace realizes promised bliss,
Forget the Bald Bard, Envy! but go burst
As the cup goes round and the cates abound,
Collops of hare with roast spinks rare!
Confess my pipings, dancings, posings served

A purpose: guttlings, guzzlings, had their use!
Say whether light Muse, Rosy-finger-tips,
Or 'best friend's' heavy-hand, Melpomené,
Touched lyre to purpose, played Amphion's part,
And built Athenai to the skies once more!
Farewell, brave couple! Next year, welcome me!"

No doubt, in what he said that night, sincere!
One story he referred to, false or fact,
Was not without adaptability.
They do say—Lais the Corinthian once
Chancing to see Euripides (who paced
Composing in a garden, tablet-book
In left hand, with appended stulos prompt)
"Answer me," she began, "O Poet,—this!
What didst intend by writing in thy play
Go hang, thou filthy doer?" Struck on heap.
Euripides, at the audacious speech—
"Well now," quoth he, "thyself art just the one
I should imagine fit for deeds of filth!"
She laughingly retorted his own line
"What 's filth,—unless who does it, thinks it so?"

So might he doubtless think. "Farewell," said we.

And he was gone, lost in the morning-grey
Rose-streaked and gold to eastward. Did we dream?
Could the poor twelve-hours hold this argument
We render durable from fugitive,
As duly at each sunset's droop of sail,
Delay of oar, submission to sea-might,
I still remember, you as duly dint
Remembrance, with the punctual rapid style,
Into—what calm cold page!

Thus soul escapes
From eloquence made captive: thus mere words
—Ah, would the lifeless body stay! But no:
Change upon change till,—who may recognize
What did soul service, in the dusty heap?
What energy of Aristophanes
Inflames the wreck Balaustion saves to show?
Ashes be evidence how fire—with smoke—
All night went lamping on! But morn must rise.
The poet—I shall say—burned up and, blank
Smouldered this ash, now white and cold enough.

Nay, Euthukles! for best, though mine it be,
Comes yet. Write on, write ever, wrong no word!

Add, first,—he gone, if jollity went too,

Some of the graver mood, which mixed and marred,
Departed likewise. Sight of narrow scope
Has this meek consolation: neither ills
We dread, nor joys we dare anticipate,
Perform to promise. Each soul sows a seed--
Euripides and Aristophanes;
Seed bears crop, scarce within our little lives;
But germinates,—perhaps enough to judge,—
Next year?

Whereas, next year brought harvest time!
For, next year came, and went not, but is now,
Still now, while you and I are bound for Rhodes
That 's all but reached—and harvest has it brought,
Dire as the homicidal dragon-crop.
Sophokles had dismissal ere it dawned,
Happy as ever; though men mournfully
Plausive,—when only soul could triumph now,
And Iophon produced his father's play,—
Crowned the consummate song where Oidipous
Dared the descent mid earthquake-thundering,
And hardly Theseus' hands availed to guard
Eyes from the horror, as their grove disgorged
Its dread ones, while each daughter sank to ground.

Then Aristophanes, on heel of that,

Triumphant also, followed with his "Frogs:"
Produced at next Lenaia,—three months since,—
The promised Main-Fight, loyal, license-free!
As if the poet, primed with Thasian juice,
(Himself swore—wine that conquers every kind
For long abiding in the head) could fix
Thenceforward any object in its truth,
Through eyeballs bathed by mere Castalian dew,
Nor miss the borrowed medium,—vinous drop
That colours all to the right crimson pitch
When mirth grows mockery, censure takes the tinge
Of malice!

All was Aristophanes:
There blazed the glory, there shot black the shame.
Ay, Bacchos did stand forth, the Tragic God
In person! and when duly dragged through mire,—
Having lied, filched, played fool, proved coward, flung
The boys their dose of fit indecency,
And finally got trounced to heart's content,
At his own feast, in his own theatre
(—Oh never fear! 'T was consecrated sport,
Exact tradition, warranted no whit
Offensive to instructed taste,—indeed,
Essential to Athenai's liberty,
Could the poor stranger understand!) why, then—

He was pronounced the rarely-qualified
To rate the work, adjust the claims to worth,
Of Aischulos (of whom, in other mood,
This same appreciative poet pleased
To say "He 's all one stiff and gluey piece
Of back of swine's neck!")—and of Chatterbox
Who, "twisting words like wool," usurped his seat
In Plouton's realm: "the arch-rogue, liar, scamp
That lives by snatching-up of altar-orts,"
—Who failed to recognize Euripides?

Then came a contest for supremacy—
Crammed full of genius, wit and fun and freak.
No spice of undue spite to spoil the dish
Of all sorts,—for the Mystics matched the Frogs
In poetry, no Seiren sang so sweet!—
Till, pressed into the service (how dispense
With Phaps-Elaphion and free foot-display?)
The Muse of dead Euripides danced frank,
Rattled her bits of tile, made all too plain
How baby-work like "Herakles" had birth:
Last, Bacchos,—candidly disclaiming brains
Able to follow finer argument,—
Confessed himself much moved by three main facts:
First,—if you stick a "Lost his flask of oil"
At pause of period, you perplex the sense—

Were it the Elegy for Marathon!
Next, if you weigh two verses, "car"—the word,
Will outweigh "club"—the word, in each packed line!
And—last, worst fact of all!—in rivalry
The younger poet dared to improvise
Laudation less distinct of—Triphales?
(Nay, that served when ourself abused the youth!)
Pheidippides? (nor that's appropriate now!)
Then,—Alkibiades, our city's hope,
Since times change and we Comics should change too!
These three main facts, well weighed, drew judgment down,
Conclusively assigned the wretch his fate—
"Fate due" admonished the sage Mystic choir,
"To sitting, prate-apace, with Sokrates,
Neglecting music and each tragic aid!"
—All wound-up by a wish "We soon may cease
From certain griefs, and warfare, worst of them!"
—Since, deaf to Comedy's persistent voice,
War still raged, still was like to rage. In vain
Had Sparté cried once more "But grant us Peace
We give you Dekeleia back!" Too shrewd
Was Kleophon to let escape, forsooth,
The enemy—at final gasp, besides!

So, Aristophanes obtained the prize,

And so Athenai felt she had a friend
Far better than her "best friend," lost last year;
And so, such fame had "Frogs" that, when came round
This present year, those Frogs croaked gay again
At the great Feast, Elaphebolion-month.
Only—there happened Aigispotamoi!

And, in the midst of the frog-merriment,
Plump o' the sudden, pounces stern King Stork
On the light-hearted people of the marsh!
Spartan Lusandros swooped precipitate,
Ended Athenai, rowed her sacred bay
With oars which brought a hundred triremes back
Captive!

And first word of the conqueror
Was "Down with those Long Walls, Peiraios' pride!
Destroy, yourselves, your bulwarks! Peace needs none!"
And "We obey" they shuddered in their dream.

But, at next quick imposure of decree—
"No longer democratic government!
Henceforth such oligarchy as ourselves
Please to appoint you!"—then the horror stung
Dreamers awake; they started up a-stare
At the half-helot captain and his crew

—Spartans, "men used to let their hair grow long,
To fast, be dirty, and just—Socratize"—
Whose word was "Trample on Themistokles!"

So, as the way is with much misery,
The heads swam, hands refused their office, hearts
Sunk as they stood in stupor. "Wreck the Walls?
Ruin Peiraios?—with our Pallas armed
For interference?—Herakles apprised,
And Theseus hasting? Lay the Long Walls low?"

Three days they stood, stared,—stonier than their walls.

Whereupon, sleep who might, Lusandros woke:
Saw the prostration of his enemy,
Utter and absolute beyond belief,
Past hope of hatred even. I surmise
He also probably saw fade in fume
Certain fears, bred of Bakis-prophecy,
Nor apprehended any more that gods
And heroes,—fire, must glow forth, guard the ground
Where prone, by sober day-dawn, corpse-like lay
Powerless Athenai, late predominant
Lady of Hellas,—Sparté's slave-prize now!
Where should a menace lurk in those slack limbs?

What was to move his circumspection? Why
Demolish just Peiraios?

"Stay!" bade he:
"Already promise-breakers? True to type,
Athenians! past and present and to come—
The fickle and the false! No stone dislodged,
No implement applied, yet three days' grace
Expire! Forbearance is no longer-lived.
By breaking promise, terms of peace you break—
Too gently framed for falsehood, fickleness!
All must be reconsidered—yours the fault!"

Wherewith, he called a council of allies.
Pent-up resentment used its privilege,—
Outburst at ending: this the summed result.

"Because we would avenge no transient wrong
But an eternity of insolence,
Aggression,—folly, no disasters mend,
Pride, no reverses teach humility,—
Because too plainly were all punishment,
Such as comports with less obdurate crime,
Evadable by falsehood, fickleness—
Experience proves the true Athenian type,—
Therefore, 't is need we dig deep down into

The root of evil; lop nor bole nor branch.
Look up, look round and see, on every side,
What nurtured the rank tree to noisome fruit!
We who live hutted (so they laugh) not housed,
Build barns for temples, prize mud-monuments,
Nor show the sneering stranger aught but—men,—
Spartans take insult of Athenians just
Because they boast Akropolis to mount,
And Propulaia to make entry by,
Through a mad maze of marble arrogance
Such as you see—such as let none see more!
Abolish the detested luxury!
Leave not one stone upon another, raze
Athenai to the rock! Let hill and plain
Become a waste, a grassy pasture-ground
Where sheep may wander, grazing goats depend
From shapeless crags once columns! so at last
Shall peace inhabit there, and peace enough."

Whereon, a shout approved "Such peace bestow!"

Then did a Man of Phokis rise—O heart!
Rise—when no bolt of Zeus disparted sky,
No omen-bird from Pallas scared the crew,
Rise—when mere human argument could stem
No foam-fringe of the passion surging fierce,

Baffle no wrath-wave that o'er barrier broke—
Who was the Man of Phokis rose and flung
A flower i' the way of that fierce foot's advance,
Which—stop for?—nay, had stamped down sword's assault!
Could it be *He* stayed Sparté with the snatch
"Daughter of Agamemnon, late my liege,
Elektra, palaced once, a visitant
To thy poor rustic dwelling, now I come?"

Ay, facing fury of revenge, and lust
Of hate, and malice moaning to appease
Hunger on prey presumptuous, prostrate now—
Full in the hideous faces—last resource,
You flung that choric flower, my Euthukles!

And see, as through some pinhole, should the wind
Wedgingly pierce but once, in with a rush
Hurries the whole wild weather, rends to rags
The weak sail stretched against the outside storm—
So did the power of that triumphant play
Pour in, and oversweep the assembled foe!
Triumphant play, wherein our poet first
Dared bring the grandeur of the Tragic Two
Down to the level of our common life,
Close to the beating of our common heart.

Elektra? 'T was Athenai, Sparté's ice
Thawed to, while that sad portraiture appealed—
Agamemnonian lady, lost by fault
Of her own kindred, cast from house and home,
Despoiled of all the brave inheritance,
Dowered humbly as befits a herdsman's mate,
Partaker of his cottage, clothed in rags,
Patient performer of the poorest chares,
Yet mindful, all the while, of glory past
When she walked darling of Mukenai, dear
Beyond Orestes to the King of Men!

So, because Greeks are Greeks, though Sparté's brood,
And hearts are hearts, though in Lusandros' breast,
And poetry is power, and Euthukles
Had faith therein to, full-face, fling the same—
Sudden, the ice-thaw! The assembled foe,
Heaving and swaying with strange friendliness,
Cried "Reverence Elektra!"—cried "Abstain
Like that chaste Herdsman, nor dare violate
The sanctity of such reverse! Let stand
Athenai!"

Mindful of that story's close,
Perchance, and how,—when he, the Herdsman chaste,
Needs apprehend no break of tranquil sleep,—

All in due time, a stranger, dark, disguised,
Knocks at the door : with searching glance, notes keen
Knows quick, through mean attire and disrespect,
The ravaged princess ! Ay, right on, the clutch
Of guiding retribution has in charge
The author of the outrage ! While one hand,
Elektra's, pulls the door behind, made fast
On fate,—the other strains, prepared to push
The victim-queen, should she make frightened pause
Before that serpentining blood which steals
Out of the darkness where, a pace beyond,
Above the slain Aigisthos, bides his blow
Dreadful Orestes !

Klutaimnestra, wise
This time, forbore ; Elektra held her own ;
Saved was Athenai through Euripides,
Through Euthukles, through—more than ever—me,
Balaustion, me, who, Wild-pomegranate-flower,
Felt my fruit triumph, and fade proudly so !

But next day, as ungracious minds are wont,
The Spartan, late surprised into a grace,
Grew sudden sober at the enormity,
And grudged, by daybreak, midnight's easy gift ;
Splenetically must repay its cost
By due increase of rigour, doglike snatch

At aught still left dog to concede like man.
Rough sea, at flow of tide, may lip, perchance,
Smoothly the land-line reached as for repose—
Lie indolent in all unquestioned sway;
But ebbing, when needs must, all thwart and loth,
Sea claws at sand relinquished strugglingly.
So, harsh Lusandros—pinioned to inflict
The lesser penalty alone—spoke harsh,
As minded to embitter scathe by scorn.

"Athenai's self be saved then, thank the Lyre!
If Tragedy withdraws her presence—quick,
If Comedy replace her,—what more just?
Let Comedy do service, frisk away,
Dance off stage these indomitable stones,
Long Walls, Peiraian bulwarks! Hew and heave,
Pick at, pound into dust each dear defence!
Not to the Kommos—*elelelelеu*
With breast bethumped, as Tragic lyre prefers,
But Comedy shall sound the flute, and crow
At kordax-end—the hearty slapping-dance!
Collect those flute-girls—trash who flattered ear
With whistlings and fed eye with caper-cuts
While we Lakonians supped black broth or crunched
Sea-urchin, conchs and all, unpricked—coarse brutes!
Command they lead off step, time steady stroke

To spade and pickaxe, till demolished lie
Athenai's pride in powder!"

Done that day—
That sixteenth famed day of Munuchion-month!
The day when Hellas fought at Salamis,
The very day Euripides was born,
Those flute-girls—Phaps-Elaphion at their head—
Did blow their best, did dance their worst, the while
Sparté pulled down the walls, wrecked wide the works,
Laid low each merest molehill of defence,
And so the Power, Athenai, passed away!

We would not see its passing. Ere I knew
The issue of their counsels,—crouching low
And shrouded by my peplos,—I conceived,
Despite the shut eyes, the stopped ears,—by count
Only of heart-beats, telling the slow time,—
Athenai's doom was signed and signified
In that assembly,—ay, but knew there watched
One who would dare and do, nor bate at all
The stranger's licensed duty,—speak the word
Allowed the Man from Phokis! Nought remained
But urge departure, flee the sights and sounds,
Hideous exultings, wailings worth contempt,
And press to other earth, new heaven, by sea

That somehow ever prompts to 'scape despair.

Help rose to heart's wish ; at the harbour-side,
The old grey mariner did reverence
To who had saved his ship, still weather-tight
As when with prow gay-garlanded she praised
The hospitable port and pushed to sea.
"Convoy Balaustion back to Rhodes, for sake
Of her and her Euripides!" laughed he.

Rhodes,—shall it not be there, my Euthukles,
Till this brief trouble of a life-time end,
That solitude—two make so populous!—
For food finds memories of the past suffice,
May be, anticipations,—hope so swells,—
Of some great future we, familiar once
With who so taught, should hail and entertain?
He lies now in the little valley, laughed
And moaned about by those mysterious streams,
Boiling and freezing, like the love and hate
Which helped or harmed him through his earthly course.
They mix in Arethousa by his grave.
The warm spring, traveller, dip thine arms into,
Brighten thy brow with! Life detests black cold.

I sent the tablets, the psalterion, so

Rewarded Sicily; the tyrant there
Bestowed them worthily in Phoibos' shrine.
A gold-graved writing tells—"I also loved
The poet, Free Athenai cheaply prized—
King Dionusios,—Archelaos-like!"

And see if young Philemon,—sure one day
To do good service and be loved himself,—
If he too have not made a votive verse!
"Grant, in good sooth, our great dead, all the same,
Retain their sense, as certain wise men say,
I 'd hang myself—to see Euripides!"
Hands off, Philemon! nowise hang thyself,
But pen the prime plays, labour the right life,
And die at good old age as grand men use,—
Keeping thee, with that great thought, warm the while,—
That he does live, Philemon! Ay, most sure!
"He lives!" hark,—waves say, winds sing out the same,
And yonder dares the citied ridge of Rhodes
Its headlong plunge from sky to sea, disparts
North bay from south,—each guarded calm, that guest
May enter gladly, blow what wind there will,—
Boiled round with breakers, to no other cry!
All in one choros,—what the master-word
They take up?—hark! "There are no gods, no gods!
Glory to God—who saves Euripides!"

THE

AGAMEMNON OF ÆSCHYLUS.

May I be permitted to chat a little, by way of recreation, at the end of a somewhat toilsome and perhaps fruitless adventure?

If, because of the immense fame of the following Tragedy, I wished to acquaint myself with it, and could only do so by the help of a translator, I should require him to be literal at every cost save that of absolute violence to our language. The use of certain allowable constructions which, happening to be out of daily favour, are all the more appropriate to archaic workmanship, is no violence: but I would be tolerant for once,—in the case of so immensely famous an original,—of even a clumsy attempt to furnish me with the very turn of each phrase in as Greek a fashion as English will bear: while, with respect to amplifications and embellishments,—anything rather than, with the good farmer, experience that most signal of mortifications, "to gape for Æschylus and

get Theognis." I should especially decline,—what may appear to brighten up a passage,—the employment of a new word for some old one—πόνος, or μέγας, or τέλος, with its congeners, recurring four times in three lines: for though such substitution may be in itself perfectly justifiable, yet this exercise of ingenuity ought to be within the competence of the unaided English reader if he likes to show himself ingenious. Learning Greek teaches Greek, and nothing else: certainly not common sense, if that have failed to precede the teaching. Further,—if I obtained a mere strict bald version of thing by thing, or at least word pregnant with thing, I should hardly look for an impossible transmission of the reputed magniloquence and sonority of the Greek; and this with the less regret, inasmuch as there is abundant musicality elsewhere, but nowhere else than in his poem the ideas of the poet. And lastly, when presented with these ideas, I should expect the result to prove very hard reading indeed if it were meant to resemble Æschylus, ξυμβαλειν οὐ ῥᾴδιος, "not easy to understand," in the opinion of his stoutest advocate among the ancients; while, I suppose, even modern scholarship sympathizes with that early declaration of the redoubtable Salmasius,

when, looking about for an example of the truly obscure for the benefit of those who found obscurity in the sacred books, he protested that this particular play leaves them all behind in this respect, with their "Hebraisms, Syriasms, Hellenisms, and the whole of such bag and baggage." [1] For, over and above the purposed ambiguity of the Chorus, the text is sadly corrupt, probably interpolated, and certainly mutilated; and no unlearned person enjoys the scholar's privilege of trying his fancy upon each obstacle whenever he comes to a stoppage, and effectually clearing the way by suppressing what seems to lie in it.

All I can say for the present performance is, that I have done as I would be done by, if need were. Should anybody, without need, honour my translation by a comparison with the original, I beg him to observe that, following no editor exclusively, I keep to the earlier readings so long as sense can be made out of them, but disregard, I hope, little of importance in recent criticism

[1] "Quis Æschylum possit affirmare Græce nunc scienti magis patere explicabilem quam Evangelia aut Epistolas Apostolicas? Unus ejus Agamemnon obscuritate superat quantum est librorum sacrorum cum suis Hebraismis et Syriasmis et tota Hellenisticæ supellectili vel farragine."

SALMASIUS *de Hellenistica*, Epist. Dedic.

so far as I have fallen in with it. Fortunately, the poorest translation, provided only it be faithful,—though it reproduce all the artistic confusion of tenses, moods, and persons, with which the original teems,—will not only suffice to display what an eloquent friend maintains to be the all-in-all of poetry—"the action of the piece"—but may help to illustrate his assurance that "the Greeks are the highest models of expression, the unapproached masters of the grand style: their expression is so excellent because it is so admirably kept in its right degree of prominence, because it is so simple and so well subordinated, because it draws its force directly from the pregnancy of the matter which it conveys . . . not a word wasted, not a sentiment capriciously thrown in, stroke on stroke!"[1] So may all happen!

Just a word more on the subject of my spelling—in a transcript from the Greek and there exclusively—Greek names and places precisely as does the Greek author. I began this practice, with great innocency of intention, some six-and-thirty years ago. Leigh Hunt, I remember, was accustomed to speak of his gratitude, when ignorant of Greek, to those writers (like Goldsmith) who had

[1] *Poems by Matthew Arnold*, Preface.

obliged him by using English characters, so that he might relish, for instance, the smooth quality of such a phrase as "hapalunetai galené;" he said also that Shelley was indignant at "Firenze" having displaced the Dantesque "Fiorenza," and would contemptuously English the intruder "Firence." I supposed I was doing a simple thing enough: but there has been till lately much astonishment at *os* and *us*, *ai* and *oi*, representing the same letters in Greek. Of a sudden, however, whether in translation or out of it, everybody seems committing the offence, although the adoption of *u* for *v* still presents such difficulty that it is a wonder how we have hitherto escaped "Eyripides." But there existed a sturdy Briton who, Ben Jonson informs us, wrote "The Life of the Emperor Anthony Pie"—whom we now acquiesce in as Antoninus Pius: for "with time and patience the mulberry leaf becomes satin." Yet there is, on all sides, much profession of respect for what Keats called "vowelled Greek"—"consonanted," one would expect; and, in a criticism upon a late admirable translation of something of my own, it was deplored that, in a certain verse corresponding in measure to the fourteenth of the sixth Pythian Ode, "neither Professor Jebb in his Greek, nor

Mr. Browning in his English, could emulate that matchlessly musical *γόνον ἰδὼν κάλλιστον ἀνδρῶν.*" Now, undoubtedly, "Seeing her son the fairest of men" has more sense than sound to boast of: but then, would not an Italian roll us out "Rimirando il figliuolo bellissimo degli uomini!" whereat Pindar, no less than Professor Jebb and Mr. Browning, *τριακτῆρος οἴχεται τυχών.*

It is recorded in the annals of Art [1] that there was once upon a time, practising so far north as Stockholm, a painter and picture-cleaner—sire of a less unhappy son—Old Muytens: and the annalist, Baron de Tessé, has not concealed his profound dissatisfaction at Old Muytens' conceit "to have himself had something to do with the work of whatever master of eminence might pass through his hands." Whence it was,—the Baron goes on to deplore,—that much detriment was done to that excellent piece "The Recognition of Achilles," by Rubens, through the perversity of Old Muytens, "who must needs take on him to beautify every nymph of the twenty by the bestowment of a widened eye and an enlarged mouth." I, at least, have left eyes and mouths everywhere as I found them, and this conservatism is all that claims praise for—

[1] *Lettres à un jeune Prince*, traduites du Suédois.

what is, after all, ἀκέλευστος ἄμισθος ἀοιδά. No, neither "uncommanded" nor "unrewarded:" since it was commanded of me by my venerated friend Thomas Carlyle, and rewarded will it indeed become if I am permitted to dignify it by the prefatory insertion of his dear and noble name.

R. B.

LONDON: *October 1st*, 1877.

PERSONS.

Warder.

Choros of Old Men.

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

TALTHUBIOS, *Herald.*

AGAMEMNON.

KASSANDRA.

AIGISTHOS.

THE AGAMEMNON OF ÆSCHYLUS.

1877.

WARDER.

The gods I ask deliverance from these labours,
Watch of a year's length whereby, slumbering through it
On the Atreidai's roofs on elbow,—dog-like—
I know of nightly star-groups the assemblage,
And those that bring to men winter and summer
Bright dynasts, as they pride them in the æther
—Stars, when they wither, and the uprisings of them.
And now on ward I wait the torch's token,
The glow of fire, shall bring from Troia message
And word of capture: so prevails audacious
The man's-way-planning hoping heart of woman.
But when I, driven from night-rest, dew-drenched hold to
This couch of mine—not looked upon by visions,
Since fear instead of sleep still stands beside me,
So as that fast I fix in sleep no eyelids—
And when to sing or chirp a tune I fancy,

For slumber such song-remedy infusing,
I wail then, for this House's fortune groaning,
Not, as of old, after the best ways governed.
Now, lucky be deliverance from these labours,
At good news—the appearing dusky fire!
O hail, thou lamp of night, a day-long lightness
Revealing, and of dances the ordainment!
Halloo, halloo!
To Agamemnon's wife I show, by shouting,
That, from bed starting up at once, i' the household
Joyous acclaim, good-omened to this torch-blaze.
She send aloft, if haply Ilion's city
Be taken, as the beacon boasts announcing.
Ay, and, for me, myself will dance a prelude,
For, that my masters' dice drop right, I 'll reckon:
Since thrice-six has it thrown to me, this signal.
Well, may it hap that, as he comes, the loved hand
O' the household's lord I may sustain with this hand!
As for the rest, I 'm mute: on tongue a big ox
Has trodden. Yet this House, if voice it take should,
Most plain would speak. So, willing I myself speak
To those who know: to who know not—I 'm blankness.

CHOROS.

The tenth year this, since Priamos' great match,
King Menelaos, Agamemnon King,

—The strenuous yoke-pair of the Atreidai's honour
Two-throned, two-sceptred, whereof Zeus was donor—
Did from this land the aid, the armament despatch,
The thousand-sailored force of Argives clamouring
" Ares " from out the indignant breast, as fling
Passion forth vultures which, because of grief
Away,—as are their young ones,—with the thief,
Lofty above their brood-nests wheel in ring,
Row round and round with oar of either wing,
Lament the bedded chicks, lost labour that was love :
Which hearing, one above
—Whether Apollon, Pan or Zeus—that wail,
Sharp-piercing bird-shriek of the guests who fare
Housemates with gods in air—
Suchanone sends, against who these assail,
What, late-sent, shall not fail
Of punishing—Erinus. Here as there,
The Guardian of the Guest, Zeus, the excelling one,
Sends against Alexandros either son
Of Atreus : for that wife, the many-husbanded,
Appointing many a tug that tries the limb,
While the knee plays the prop in dust, while, shred
To morsels, lies the spear-shaft ; in those grim
Marriage-prolusions when their Fury wed
Danaoi and Troes, both alike. All 's said :
Things are where things are, and, as fate has willed,

So shall they be fulfilled.
Not gently-grieving, not just doling out
The drops of expiation—no, nor tears distilled—
Shall he we know of bring the hard about
To soft—that intense ire
At those mock rites unsanctified by fire.
But we pay nought here: through our flesh, age-weighed,
Left out from who gave aid
In that day,—we remain,
Staying on staves a strength
The equal of a child's at length.
For when young marrow in the breast doth reign,
That 's the old man's match,—Ares out of place
In either: but in oldest age's case,
Foliage a-fading, why, he wends his way
On three feet, and, no stronger than a child,
Wanders about gone wild,
A dream in day.

But thou, Tundareus' daughter, Klutaimnestra queen,
What need? What new? What having heard or seen,
By what announcement's tidings, everywhere
Settest thou, round about, the sacrifice a-flare?
For, of all gods the city-swaying,
Those supernal, those infernal,
Those of the fields', those of the mart's obeying,—

The altars blaze with gifts ;
And here and there, heaven-high the torch uplifts
Flame—medicated with persuasions mild,
With foul admixture unbeguiled—
Of holy unguent, from the clotted chrism
Brought from the palace, safe in its abysm.
Of these things, speaking what may be indeed
Both possible and lawful to concede,
Healer do thou become !—of this solicitude
Which, now, stands plainly forth of evil mood,
And, then . . . but from oblations, hope, to-day
Gracious appearing, wards away
From soul the insatiate care,
The sorrow at my breast, devouring there !

Empowered am I to sing
The omens, what their force which, journeying,
Rejoiced the potentates :
(For still, from God, inflates
My breast song-suasion : age,
Born to the business, still such war can wage)
—How the fierce bird against the Teukris land
Despatched, with spear and executing hand,
The Achaian's two-throned empery—o'er Hellas' youth
Two rulers with one mind :
The birds' king to these kings of ships, on high,

—The black sort, and the sort that 's white behind,—
Appearing by the palace, on the spear-throw side,
In right sky-regions, visible far and wide,—
Devouring a hare-creature, great with young,
Baulked of more racings they, as she from whom they
sprung!
Ah, Linos, say—ah, Linos, song of wail!
But may the good prevail!

The prudent army-prophet seeing two
The Atreidai, two their tempers, knew
Those feasting on the hare
The armament-conductors were;
And thus he spoke, explaining signs in view.
"In time, this outset takes the town of Priamos:
But all before its towers,—the people's wealth that was,
Of flocks and herds,—as sure, shall booty-sharing thence
Drain to the dregs away, by battle violence.
Only, have care lest grudge of any god disturb
With cloud the unsullied shine of that great force, the curb
Of Troia, struck with damp
Beforehand in the camp!
For envyingly is
The virgin Artemis
Toward—her father's flying hounds—this House—
The sacrificers of the piteous

And cowering beast,
Brood and all, ere the birth: she hates the eagles' feast.
Ah, Linos, say—ah, Linos, song of wail!
But may the good prevail!

"Thus ready is the beauteous one with help
To those small dewdrop-things fierce lions whelp,
And udder-loving litter of each brute
That roams the mead; and therefore makes she suit,
The fair one, for fulfilment to the end
Of things these signs portend—
Which partly smile, indeed, but partly scowl—
The phantasms of the fowl.
I call Ieïos Paian to avert
She work the Danaoi hurt
By any thwarting waftures, long and fast
Holdings from sail of ships:
And sacrifice, another than the last,
She for herself precipitate—
Something unlawful, feast for no man's lips,
Builder of quarrels, with the House cognate—
Having in awe no husband: for remains
A frightful, backward-darting in the path,
Wily house-keeping chronicler of wrath,
That has to punish that old children's fate!"
Such things did Kalchas,—with abundant gains

As well,—vociferate,
Predictions from the birds, in journeying,
Above the abode of either king.
With these, symphonious, sing—
Ah, Linos, say—ah, Linos, song of wail!
But may the good prevail!

Zeus, whosoe'er he be,—if that express
Aught dear to him on whom I call—
So do I him address.
I cannot liken out, by all
Admeasurement of powers,
Any but Zeus for refuge at such hours,
If veritably needs I must
From off my soul its vague care-burthen thrust.

Not—whosoever was the great of yore,
Bursting to bloom with bravery all round—
Is in our mouths: he was, but is no more.
And who it was that after came to be,
Met the thrice-throwing wrestler,—he
Is also gone to ground.
But "Zeus"—if any, heart and soul, that name—
Shouting the triumph-praise—proclaim,
Complete in judgment shall that man be found.
Zeus, who leads onward mortals to be wise,

Appoints that suffering masterfully teach.
In sleep, before the heart of each,
A woe-remembering travail sheds in dew
Discretion,—ay, and melts the unwilling too
By what, perchance, may be a graciousness
Of gods, enforced no less,—
As they, commanders of the crew,
Assume the awful seat.

And then the old leader of the Achaian fleet,
Disparaging no seer—
With bated breath to suit misfortune's inrush here
—(What time it laboured, that Achaian host,
By stay from sailing,—every pulse at length
Emptied of vital strength,—
Hard over Kalchis shore-bound, current-crost
In Aulis station,—while the winds which post
From Strumon, ill-delayers, famine-fraught,
Tempters of man to sail where harbourage is naught,
Spendthrifts of ships and cables, turning time
To twice the length,—these carded, by delay,
To less and less away
The Argeians' flowery prime:
And when a remedy more grave and grand
Than aught before,—yea, for the storm and dearth,—
The prophet to the foremost in command

Shrieked forth, as cause of this
Adducing Artemis,
So that the Atreidai striking staves on earth
Could not withhold the tear)—
Then did the king, the elder, speak this clear.

"Heavy the fate, indeed,—to disobey!
Yet heavy if my child I slay,
The adornment of my household: with the tide
Of virgin-slaughter, at the altar-side,
A father's hands defiling: which the way
Without its evils, say?
How shall I turn fleet-fugitive,
Failing of duty to allies?
Since for a wind-abating sacrifice
And virgin blood,—'t is right they strive,
Nay, madden with desire.
Well may it work them—this that they require!"

But when he underwent necessity's
Yoke-trace,—from soul blowing unhallowed change
Unclean, abominable,—thence—another man—
The audacious mind of him began
Its wildest range.
For this it is gives mortals hardihood—
Some vice-devising miserable mood

Of madness, and first woe of all the brood.
The sacrificer of his daughter—strange!—
He dared become, to expedite
Woman-avenging warfare,—anchors weighed
With such prelusive rite!

Prayings and callings "Father"—naught they made
Of these, and of the virgin-age,—
Captains heart-set on war to wage!
His ministrants, vows done, the father bade—
Kid-like, above the altar, swathed in pall,
Take her—lift high, and have no fear at all,
Head-downward, and the fair mouth's guard
And frontage hold,—press hard
From utterance a curse against the House
By dint of bit—violence bridling speech.
And as to ground her saffron-vest she shed,
She smote the sacrificers all and each
With arrow sweet and piteous,
From the eye only sped,—
Significant of will to use a word,
Just as in pictures: since, full many a time,
In her sire's guest-hall, by the well-heaped board
Had she made music,—lovingly with chime
Of her chaste voice, that unpolluted thing,
Honoured the third libation,—paian that should bring

Good fortune to the sire she loved so well.

What followed—those things I nor saw nor tell.
But Kalchas' arts,—whate'er they indicate,—
Miss of fulfilment never: it is fate.
True, justice makes, in sufferers, a desire
To know the future woe preponderate.
But—hear before is need?
To that, farewell and welcome! 't is the same, indeed,
As grief beforehand: clearly, part for part,
Conformably to Kalchas' art,
Shall come the event.
But be they as they may, things subsequent,—
What is to do, prosperity betide
E'en as we wish it!—we, the next allied,
Sole guarding barrier of the Apian land.

I am come, reverencing power in thee,
O Klutaimnestra! For 't is just we bow
To the ruler's wife,—the male-seat man-bereaved.
But if thou, having heard good news,—or none,—
For good news' hope dost sacrifice thus wide,
I would hear gladly: art thou mute,—no grudge!

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Good-news-announcer, may—as is the by-word—

Morn become, truly,—news from Night his mother!
But thou shalt learn joy past all hope of hearing.
Priamos' city have the Argeioi taken.

CHOROS.

How sayest? The word, from want of faith, escaped me.

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Troia the Achaioi hold: do I speak plainly?

CHOROS.

Joy overcreeps me, calling forth the tear-drop.

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Right! for, that glad thou art, thine eye convicts thee.

CHOROS.

For—what to thee, of all this, trusty token?

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

What 's here! how else? unless the god have cheated.

CHOROS.

Haply thou flattering shows of dreams respectest?

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

No fancy would I take of soul sleep-burthened.

CHOROS.

But has there puffed thee up some unwinged omen?

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

As a young maid's my mind thou mockest grossly.

CHOROS.

Well, at what time was—even sacked, the city?

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Of this same mother Night—the dawn, I tell thee.

CHOROS.

And who of messengers could reach this swiftness?

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Hephaistos—sending a bright blaze from Ide.
Beacon did beacon send, from fire the poster,
Hitherward: Ide to the rock Hermaian
Of Lemnos: and a third great torch o' the island

Zeus' seat received in turn, the Athoan summit.
And,—so upsoaring as to stride sea over,
The strong lamp-voyager, and all for joyance—
Did the gold-glorious splendour, any sun like,
Pass on—the pine-tree—to Makistos' watch-place;
Who did not,—tardy,—caught, no wits about him,
By sleep,—decline his portion of the missive.
And far the beacon's light, on stream Euripos
Arriving, made aware Messapios' warders,
And up they lit in turn, played herald onwards,
Kindling with flame a heap of grey old heather.
And, strengthening still, the lamp, decaying nowise,
Springing o'er Plain Asopos,—full-moon-fashion
Effulgent,—toward the crag of Mount Kithairon,
Roused a new rendering-up of fire the escort—
And light, far escort, lacked no recognition
O' the guard—as burning more than burnings told you
And over Lake Gorgopis light went leaping,
And, at Mount Aigiplanktos safe arriving,
Enforced the law—"to never stint the fire-stuff."
And they send, lighting up with ungrudged vigour,
Of flame a huge beard, ay, the very foreland
So as to strike above, in burning onward,
The look-out which commands the Strait Saronic.
Then did it dart until it reached the outpost
Mount Arachnaios here, the city's neighbour;

And then darts to this roof of the Atreidai
This light of Ide's fire not unforefathered!
Such are the rules prescribed the flambeau-bearers:
He beats that 's first and also last in running.
Such is the proof and token I declare thee,
My husband having sent me news from Troia.

CHOROS.

The gods, indeed, anon will I pray, woman!
But now, these words to hear, and sate my wonder
Thoroughly, I am fain—if twice thou tell them.

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Troia do the Achaioi hold, this same day.
I think a noise—no mixture—reigns i' the city.
Sour wine and unguent pour thou in one vessel—
Standers-apart, not lovers, wouldst thou style them:
And so, of captives and of conquerors, partwise
The voices are to hear, of fortune diverse.
For those, indeed, upon the bodies prostrate
Of husbands, brothers, children upon parents
—The old men, from a throat that 's free no longer,
Shriekingly wail the death-doom of their dearest:
While these—the after-battle hungry labour,
Which prompts night-faring, marshals them to breakfast

On the town's store, according to no billet
Of sharing, but as each drew lot of fortune.
In the spear-captured Troic habitations
House they already: from the frosts upæthral
And dews delivered, will they, luckless creatures,
Without a watch to keep, slumber all night through.
And if they fear the gods, the city-guarders,
And the gods' structures of the conquered country,
They may not—capturers—soon in turn be captive.
But see no prior lust befall the army
To sack things sacred—by gain-cravings vanquished!
For there needs homeward the return's salvation,
To round the new limb back o' the double race-course.
And guilty to the gods if came the army,
Awakened up the sorrow of those slaughtered
Might be—should no outbursting evils happen.
But may good beat—no turn to see i' the balance!
For, many benefits I want the gain of.

CHOROS.

Woman, like prudent man thou kindly speakest.
And I, thus having heard thy trusty tokens,
The gods to rightly hail forthwith prepare me;
For, grace that must be paid has crowned our labours.

O Zeus the king, and friendly Night

Of these brave boons bestower—
Thou who didst fling on Troia's every tower
The o'er-roofing snare, that neither great thing might,
Nor any of the young ones, overpass
Captivity's great sweep-net—one and all
Of Ate held in thrall!
Ay, Zeus I fear—the guest's friend great—who was
The doer of this, and long since bent
The bow on Alexandros with intent
That neither wide o' the white
Nor o'er the stars the foolish dart should light.
The stroke of Zeus—they have it, as men say!
This, at least, from the source track forth we may!
As he ordained, so has he done.
"No"—said someone—
"The gods think fit to care
Nowise for mortals, such
As those by whom the good and fair
Of things denied their touch
Is trampled!" but he was profane.
That they do care, has been made plain
To offspring of the over-bold,
Outbreathing "Ares" greater than is just—
Houses that spill with more than they can hold,
More than is best for man. Be man's what must
Keep harm off, so that in himself he find

Sufficiency—the well-endowed of mind!
For there 's no bulwark in man's wealth to him
Who, through a surfeit, kicks—into the dim
And disappearing—Right's great altar.

Yes—

It urges him, the sad persuasiveness,
Ate's insufferable child that schemes
Treason beforehand: and all cure is vain.
It is not hidden: out it glares again,
A light dread-lamping-mischief, just as gleams
The badness of the bronze;
Through rubbing, puttings to the touch,
Black-clotted is he, judged at once.
He seeks—the boy—a flying bird to clutch,
The insufferable brand
Setting upon the city of his land
Whereof not any god hears prayer;
While him who brought about such evils there,
That unjust man, the god in grapple throws.
Such an one, Paris goes
Within the Atreidai's house—
Shamed the guest's board by robbery of the spouse.

And, leaving to her townsmen throngs a-spread
With shields, and spear-thrusts of sea-armament,

And bringing Ilion, in a dowry's stead,
Destruction—swiftly through the gates she went,
Daring the undareable. But many a groan outbroke
From prophets of the House as thus they spoke.
"Woe, woe the House, the House and Rulers,—woe
The marriage-bed and dints
A husband's love imprints!
There she stands silent! meets no honour—no
Shame—sweetest still to see of things gone long ago!
And, through desire of one across the main,
A ghost will seem within the house to reign.
And hateful to the husband is the grace
Of well-shaped statues: from—in place of eyes
Those blanks—all Aphrodite dies.

"But dream-appearing mournful fantasies—
There they stand, bringing grace that 's vain.
For vain 't is, when brave things one seems to view;
The fantasy has floated off, hands through;
Gone, that appearance,—nowise left to creep,—
On wings, the servants in the paths of sleep!"
Woes, then, in household and on hearth, are such
As these—and woes surpassing these by much.
But not these only: everywhere—
For those who from the land
Of Hellas issued in a band,

Sorrow, the heart must bear,
Sits in the home of each, conspicuous there.
Many a circumstance, at least,
Touches the very breast.
For those
Whom any sent away,—he knows:
And in the live man's stead,
Armour and ashes reach
The house of each.

For Ares, gold-exchanger for the dead,
And balance-holder in the fight o' the spear,
Due-weight from Ilion sends—
What moves the tear on tear—
A charred scrap to the friends:
Filling with well-packed ashes every urn,
For man—that was—the sole return.
And they groan—praising much, the while,
Now this man as experienced in the strife,
Now that, fallen nobly on a slaughtered pile,
Because of—not his own—another's wife.
But things there be, one barks,
When no man harks:
A surreptitious grief that 's grudge
Against the Atreidai who first sought the judge.
But some there, round the rampart, have

In Ilian earth, each one his grave:
All fair-formed as at birth,
It hid them—what they have and hold—the hostile
earth.

And big with anger goes the city's word,
And pays a debt by public curse incurred.
And ever with me—as about to hear
A something night-involved—remains my fear:
Since of the many-slayers—not
Unwatching are the gods.
The black Erinues, at due periods—
Whoever gains the lot
Of fortune with no right—
Him, by life's strain and stress
Back-again-beaten from success,
They strike blind: and among the out-of-sight
For who has got to be, avails no might.
The being praised outrageously
Is grave, for at the eyes of such an one
Is launched, from Zeus, the thunder-stone.
Therefore do I decide
For so much and no more prosperity
Than of his envy passes unespied.
Neither a city-sacker would I be,
Nor life, myself by others captive, see.

A swift report has gone our city through,
From fire, the good-news messenger : if true,
Who knows ? Or is it not a god-sent lie ?
Who is so childish and deprived of sense
That, having, at announcements of the flame
Thus novel, felt his own heart fired thereby,
He then shall at a change of evidence,
Be worsted just the same ?
It is conspicuous in a woman's nature,
Before its view to take a grace for granted :
Too trustful,—on her boundary, usurpature
Is swiftly made ;
But swiftly, too, decayed,
The glory perishes by woman vaunted.

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Soon shall we know—of these light-bearing torches,
And beacons and exchanges, fire with fire—
If they are true, indeed, or if, dream-fashion,
This gladsome light came and deceived our judg-
ment.
Yon herald from the shore I see, o'ershadowed
With boughs of olive : dust, mud's thirsty brother,
Close neighbours on his garb, thus testify me
That neither voiceless, nor yet kindling for thee

Mountain-wood-flame, shall he explain by fire-smoke:
But either tell out more the joyance, speaking. . . .
Word contrary to which, I aught but love it!
For may good be—to good that 's known—appendage!

CHOROS.

Whoever prays for aught else to this city
—May he himself reap fruit of his mind's error!

HERALD.

Ha, my forefathers' soil of earth Argeian!
Thee, in this year's tenth light, am I returned to—
Of many broken hopes, on one hope chancing;
For never prayed I, in this earth Argeian
Dying, to share my part in tomb the dearest.
Now, hail thou earth, and hail thou also, sunlight,
And Zeus, the country's lord, and king the Puthian
From bow no longer urging at us arrows!
Enough, beside Skamandros, cam'st thou adverse:
Now, contrary, be saviour thou and healer,
O king Apollon! And gods conquest-granting,
All—I invoke too, and my tutelary
Hermes, dear herald, heralds' veneration,—
And Heroes our forthsenders,—friendly, once more
The army to receive, the war-spear's leavings!

Ha, mansions of my monarchs, roofs beloved,
And awful seats, and deities sun-fronting—
Receive with pomp your monarch, long time absent!
For he comes bringing light in night-time to you,
In common with all these—king Agamemnon.
But kindly greet him—for clear shows your duty—
Who has dug under Troia with the mattock
Of Zeus the Avenger, whereby plains are out-ploughed,
Altars unrecognizable, and gods' shrines,
And the whole land's seed thoroughly has perished.
And such a yoke-strap having cast round Troia,
The elder king Atreides, happy man—he
Comes to be honoured, worthiest of what mortals
Now are. Nor Paris nor the accomplice-city
Outvaunts their deed as more than they are done-by:
For, in a suit for rape and theft found guilty,
He missed of plunder and, in one destruction,
Fatherland, house and home has mowed to atoms:
Debts the Priamidai have paid twice over.

CHOROS.

Hail, herald from the army of Achaians!

HERALD.

I hail:—to die, will gainsay gods no longer!

CHOROS.

Love of this fatherland did exercise thee?

HERALD.

So that I weep, at least, with joy, my eyes full.

CHOROS.

What, of this gracious sickness were ye gainers?

HERALD.

How now? instructed, I this speech shall master.

CHOROS.

For those who loved you back, with longing stricken.

HERALD.

This land yearned for the yearning army, say'st thou?

CHOROS.

So as to set me oft, from dark mind, groaning.

HERALD.

Whence came this ill mind—hatred to the army?

CHOROS.

Of old, I use, for mischief's physic, silence.

HERALD.

And how, the chiefs away, did you fear any?

CHOROS.

So that now,—late thy word,—much joy were—dying!

HERALD.

For well have things been worked out: these,—in much time,
Some of them, one might say, had luck in falling,
While some were faulty: since who, gods excepted,
Goes, through the whole time of his life, ungrieving?
For labours should I tell of, and bad lodgments,
Narrow deckways ill-strewn, too,—what the day's woe
We did not groan at getting for our portion?
As for land-things, again, on went more hatred!
Since beds were ours hard by the foemen's ramparts,
And, out of heaven and from the earth, the meadow
Dews kept a-sprinkle, an abiding damage
Of vestures, making hair a wild-beast matting.
Winter, too, if one told of it -bird-slaying—

Such as, unbearable, Idaian snow brought—
Or heat, when waveless, on its noontide couches
Without a wind, the sea would slumber falling
—Why must one mourn these? O'er and gone is labour:
O'er and gone is it, even to those dead ones,
So that no more again they mind uprising.
Why must we tell in numbers those deprived ones,
And the live man be vexed with fate's fresh outbreak?
Rather, I bid full farewell to misfortunes!
For us, the left from out the Argeian army,
The gain beats, nor does sorrow counterbalance.
So that 't is fitly boasted of, this sunlight,
By us, o'er sea and land the aery flyers,
"Troia at last taking, the band of Argives
Hang up such trophies to the gods of Hellas
Within their domes—new glory to grow ancient!"
Such things men having heard must praise the city
And army-leaders: and the grace which wrought them—
Of Zeus, shall honoured be. Thou hast my whole word.

CHOROS.

O'ercome by words, their sense I do not gainsay.
For, aye this breeds youth in the old—"to learn well."
But these things most the house and Klutaimnestra
Concern, 't is likely: while they make me rich, too.

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

I shouted long ago, indeed, for joyance,
When came that first night-messenger of fire
Proclaiming Ilion's capture and dispersion.
And someone, girding me, said, "Through fire-bearers
Persuaded—Troia to be sacked now, thinkest?
Truly, the woman's way,—high to lift heart up!"
By such words I was made seem wit-bewildered:
Yet still I sacrificed; and,—female-song with,—
A shout one man and other, through the city,
Set up, congratulating in the gods' seats,
Soothing the incense-eating flame right fragrant.
And now, what 's more, indeed, why need'st thou tell me?
I of the king himself shall learn the whole word:
And,—as may best be,—I my revered husband
Shall hasten, as he comes back, to receive: for—
What 's to a wife sweeter to see than this light
(Her husband, by the god saved, back from warfare)
So as to open gates? This tell my husband—
To come at soonest to his loving city.
A faithful wife at home may he find, coming!
Such an one as he left—the dog o' the household—
Trusty to him, adverse to the ill-minded,
And, in all else, the same: no signet-impress
Having done harm to, in that time's duration.

I know nor pleasure, nor blameworthy converse
With any other man more than—bronze-dippings!

HERALD.

Such boast as this—brimful of the veracious—
Is, for a high-born dame, not bad to send forth!

CHOROS.

Ay, she spoke thus to thee—that hast a knowledge
From clear interpreters—a speech most seemly.
But speak thou, herald! Meneleos I ask of:
If he, returning, back in safety also
Will come with you—this land's beloved chieftain?

HERALD.

There 's no way I might say things false and pleasant
For friends to reap the fruits of through a long time.

CHOROS.

How then if, speaking good, things true thou chance on

HERALD.

For not well-hidden things become they, sundered.
The man has vanished from the Achaic army,

He and his ship too. I announce no falsehood.

CHOROS.

Whether forth-putting openly from Ilion,
Or did storm—wide woe—snatch him from the army?

HERALD.

Like topping bowman, thou hast touched the target,
And a long sorrow hast succinctly spoken.

CHOROS.

Whether, then, of him, as a live or dead man
Was the report by other sailors bruited?

HERALD.

Nobody knows so as to tell out clearly
Excepting Helios who sustains earth's nature.

CHOROS.

How say'st thou then, did storm the naval army
Attack and end, by the celestials' anger?

HERALD.

It suits not to defile a day auspicious

With ill-announcing speech: distinct each god's due:
And when a messenger with gloomy visage
To a city bears a fall'n host's woes—God ward off!—
One popular wound that happens to the city,
And many sacrificed from many households—
Men, scourged by that two-thonged whip Ares loves so,
Double spear-headed curse, bloody yoke-couple,—
Of woes like these, doubtless, whoe'er comes weighted,
Him does it suit to sing the Erinues' paian.
But who, of matters saved a glad-news-bringer,
Comes to a city in good estate rejoicing. . . .
How shall I mix good things with evil, telling
Of storm against the Achaioi, urged by gods' wrath?
For they swore league, being arch-foes before that,
Fire and the sea: and plighted troth approved they,
Destroying the unhappy Argeian army.
At night began the bad-wave-outbreak evils;
For, ships against each other Threkian breezes
Shattered: and these, butted at in a fury
By storm and typhoon, with surge rain-resounding,—
Off they went, vanished, thro' a bad herd's whirling.
And, when returned the brilliant light of Helios,
We view the Aigaian sea on flower with corpses
Of men Achaian and with naval ravage.
But us indeed, and ship, unhurt i' the hull too,
Either someone outstole us or outprayed us—

Some god—no man it was the tiller touching.
And Fortune, saviour, willing on our ship sat.
So as it neither had in harbour wave-surge
Nor ran aground against a shore all rocky.
And then, the water-Haides having fled from
In the white day, not trusting to our fortune,
We chewed the cud in thoughts—this novel sorrow
O' the army labouring and badly pounded.
And now—if anyone of them is breathing—
They talk of us as having perished: why not?
And we—that they the same fate have, imagine.
May it be for the best! Meneleos, then,
Foremost and specially to come, expect thou!
If (that is) any ray o' the sun reports him
Living and seeing too—by Zeus' contrivings,
Not yet disposed to quite destroy the lineage—
Some hope is he shall come again to household.
Having heard such things, know, thou truth art hearing!

CHOROS.

Who may he have been that named thus wholly with exactitude—
(Was he someone whom we see not, by forecastings of the future
Guiding tongue in happy mood?)

—Her with battle for a bridegroom, on all sides contention-wooed,
Helena? Since—mark the suture!—
Ship's-Hell, Man's-Hell, City's-Hell,
From the delicately-pompous curtains that pavilion well,
Forth, by favour of the gale
Of earth-born Zephuros did she sail.
Many shield-bearers, leaders of the pack,
Sailed too upon their track,
Theirs who had directed oar,
Then visible no more,
To Simois' leaf-luxuriant shore—
For sake of strife all gore!

To Ilion Wrath, fulfilling her intent,
This marriage-care—the rightly named so—sent:
In after-time, for the tables' abuse
And that of the hearth-partaker Zeus,
Bringing to punishment
Those who honoured with noisy throat
The honour of the bride, the hymenæal note
Which did the kinsfolk then to singing urge.
But, learning a new hymn for that which was,
The ancient city of Priamos
Groans probably a great and general dirge,
Denominating Paris

"The man that miserably marries:"—
She who, all the while before,
A life, that was a general dirge
For citizens' unhappy slaughter, bore.

And thus a man, by no milk's help,
Within his household reared a lion's whelp
That loved the teat
In life's first festal stage:
Gentle as yet,
A true child-lover, and, to men of age,
A thing whereat pride warms;
And oft he had it in his arms
Like any new-born babe, bright-faced, to hand
Wagging its tail, at belly's strict command.

But in due time upgrown,
The custom of progenitors was shown:
For—thanks for sustenance repaying
With ravage of sheep slaughtered—
It made unbidden feast;
With blood the house was watered,
To household came a woe there was no staying:
Great mischief many-slaying!
From God it was—some priest
Of Até, in the house, by nurture thus increased.

At first, then, to the city of Ilion went
A soul, as I might say, of windless calm—
Wealth's quiet ornament,
An eyes'-dart bearing balm,
Love's spirit-biting flower.
But—from the true course bending—
She brought about, of marriage, bitter ending:
Ill-resident, ill-mate, in power
Passing to the Priamidai—by sending
Of Hospitable Zeus—
Erinus for a bride,—to make brides mourn, her dower.

Spoken long ago
Was the ancient saying
Still among mortals staying:
"Man's great prosperity at height of rise
Engenders offspring nor unchilded dies;
And, from good fortune, to such families,
Buds forth insatiate woe."
Whereas, distinct from any,
Of my own mind I am:
For 't is the unholy deed begets the many,
Resembling each its dam.
Of households that correctly estimate,
Ever a beauteous child is born of Fate.

But ancient Arrogance delights to generate
Arrogance, young and strong mid mortals' sorrow,
Or now, or then, when comes the appointed morrow.
And she bears young Satiety;
And, fiend with whom nor fight nor war can be,
Unholy Daring—twin black Curses
Within the household, children like their nurses.

But Justice shines in smoke-grimed habitations,
And honours the well-omened life;
While,—gold-besprinkled stations
Where the hands' filth is rife,
With backward-turning eyes
Leaving,—to holy seats she hies,
Not worshipping the power of wealth
Stamped with applause by stealth:
And to its end directs each thing begun.

Approach then, my monarch, of Troia the sacker, of Atreus the son!
How ought I address thee, how ought I revere thee,—nor yet overhitting
Nor yet underbending the grace that is fitting?
Many of mortals hasten to honour the seeming-to-be—
Passing by justice: and, with the ill-faring, to groan as he groans all are free.

But no bite of the sorrow their liver has reached to:
They say with the joyful,—one outside on each, too,
As they force to a smile smileless faces.
But whoever is good at distinguishing races
In sheep of his flock—it is not for the eyes
Of a man to escape such a shepherd's surprise,
As they seem, from a well-wishing mind,
In watery friendship to fawn and be kind.
Thou to me, then, indeed, sending an army for Helena's sake,
(I will not conceal it) wast—oh, by no help of the Muses!—depicted
Not well of thy midriff the rudder directing,—convicted
Of bringing a boldness they did not desire to the men with existence at stake.
But now—from no outside of mind, nor unlovingly—gracious thou art
To those who have ended the labour, fulfilling their part;
And in time shalt thou know, by inquiry instructed,
Who of citizens justly, and who not to purpose, the city conducted.

AGAMEMNON.

First, indeed, Argos, and the gods, the local,
T is right addressing—those with me the partners

In this return and right things done the city
Of Priamos: gods who, from no tongue hearing
The rights o' the cause, for Ilion's fate man-slaught'rous
Into the bloody vase, not oscillating,
Put the vote-pebbles, while, o' the rival vessel,
Hope rose up to the lip-edge: filled it was not.
By smoke the captured city is still conspicuous:
Até's burnt offerings live: and, dying with them,
The ash sends forth the fulsome blasts of riches.
Of these things, to the gods grace many-mindful
'T is right I render, since both nets outrageous
We built them round with, and, for sake of woman,
It did the city to dust—the Argeian monster,
The horse's nestling, the shield-bearing people
That made a leap, at setting of the Pleiads,
And, vaulting o'er the tower, the raw-flesh-feeding
Lion licked up his fill of blood tyrannic.
I to the gods indeed prolonged this preface;
But—as for *thy* thought, I remember hearing—
I say the same, and thou co-pleader hast me.
Since few of men this faculty is born with—
To honour, without grudge, their friend, successful.
For moody, on the heart, a poison seated
Its burthen doubles to who gained the sickness:
By his own griefs he is himself made heavy,
And out-of-door prosperity seeing groans at.

Knowing, I 'd call (for well have I experienced)
" Fellowship's mirror," " phantom of a shadow,"
Those seeming to be mighty gracious to me:
While just Odusseus—he who sailed not willing—
When joined on, was to me the ready trace-horse.
This of him, whether dead or whether living,
I say. For other city-and-gods' concernment—
Appointing common courts, in full assemblage
We will consult. And as for what holds seemly—
How it may lasting stay well, must be counselled:
While what has need of medicines Paionian
We, either burning or else cutting kindly,
Will make endeavour to turn pain from sickness.
And now into the domes and homes by altar
Going, I to the gods first raise the right-hand—
They who, far sending, back again have brought me.
And Victory, since she followed, fixed remain she!

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Men, citizens, Argeians here, my worships!
I shall not shame me, consort-loving manners
To tell before you: for in time there dies off
The diffidence from people. Not from others
Learning, I of myself will tell the hard life
I bore so long as this man was 'neath Ilion.

First: for a woman, from the male divided,
To sit at home alone, is monstrous evil—
Hearing the many rumours back-revenging:
And for now This to come, now That bring after
Woe, and still worse woe, bawling in the household!
And truly, if so many wounds had chanced on
My husband here, as homeward used to dribble
Report, he 's pierced more than a net to speak of!
While, were he dying (as the words abounded)
A triple-bodied Geruon the Second,
Plenty above—for loads below I count not—
Of earth a three-share cloak he 'd boast of taking,
Once only dying in each several figure!
Because of suchlike rumours back-revenging,
Many the halters from my neck, above head,
Others than *I* loosed—loosed from neck by main force!
From this cause, sure, the boy stands not beside me—
Possessor of our troth-plights, thine and mine too—
As ought Orestes: be not thou astonished!
For, him brings up our well-disposed guest-captive
Strophios the Phokian—ills that told on both sides
To me predicting—both of thee 'neath Ilion
The danger, and if anarchy's mob-uproar
Should overthrow thy council; since 't is born with

Mortals,—whoe'er has fallen, the more to kick him.
Such an excuse, I think, no cunning carries !
As for myself—why, of my wails the rushing
Fountains are dried up : not in them a drop more !
And in my late-to-bed eyes I have damage,
Bewailing what concerned thee, those torch-holdings
For ever unattended to. In dreams—why,
Beneath the light wing-beats o' the gnat, I woke up
As he went buzzing—sorrows that concerned thee
Seeing, that filled more than their fellow-sleep-time.
Now, all this having suffered, from soul grief-free
I would style this man here the dog o' the stables,
The saviour forestay of the ship, the high roof's
Ground-prop, son sole-begotten to his father,
—Ay, land appearing to the sailors past hope,
Loveliest day to see after a tempest,
To the wayfaring-one athirst a well-spring,
—The joy, in short, of 'scaping all that 's—fatal !
I judge him worth addresses such as these are
—Envy stand off !—for many those old evils
We underwent. And now, to me—dear headship !—
Dismount thou from this car, not earthward setting
The foot of thine, O king, that's Ilion's spoiler !
Slave-maids, why tarry?—whose the task allotted
To strew the soil o' the road with carpet-spreadings.
Immediately be purple-strewn the pathway,

So that to home unhoped may lead him—Justice !
As for the rest, care shall—by no sleep conquered—
Dispose things—justly (gods to aid !) appointed.

AGAMEMNON.

Offspring of Leda, of my household warder,
Suitably to my absence hast thou spoken,
For long the speech thou didst outstretch ! But aptly
To praise—from others ought to go this favour.
And for the rest,—not me, in woman's fashion,
Mollify, nor—as mode of barbarous man is—
To me gape forth a groundward-falling clamour !
Nor, strewing it with garments, make my passage
Envied ! Gods, sure, with these behoves we honour :
But, for a mortal on these varied beauties
To walk—to me, indeed, is nowise fear-free.
I say—as man, not god, to me do homage !
Apart from foot-mats both and varied vestures,
Renown is loud, and—not to lose one's senses,
God's greatest gift. Behoves we him call happy
Who has brought life to end in loved well-being.
If all things I might manage thus—brave man, I !

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Come now, this say, nor feign a feeling to me !

AGAMEMNON.

With feeling, know indeed, I do not tamper!

KLUTAIMNESTRA

Vowed'st thou to the gods, in fear, to act thus?

AGAMEMNON.

If any, *I* well knew resolve I outspoke.

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

What think'st thou Priamos had done, thus victor?

AGAMEMNON.

On varied vests—I do think—he had passaged.

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Then, do not, struck with awe at human censure. . . .

AGAMEMNON.

Well, popular mob-outcry much avails too.

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Ay, but the unenvied is not the much valued.

AGAMEMNON.

Sure, 't is no woman's part to long for battle.

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Why, to the prosperous, even suits a beating.

AGAMEMNON.

What? thou this beating us in war dost prize too?

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Persuade thee! power, for once, grant *me*—and willing!

AGAMEMNON.

But if this seem so to thee—shoes, let someone
Loose under, quick—foot's serviceable carriage!
And me, on these sea-products walking, may no
Grudge from a distance, from the god's eye, strike at!
For great shame were my strewment-spoiling—riches
Spoiling with feet, and silver-purchased textures!
Of these things, thus then. But this female-stranger
Tenderly take inside! Who conquers mildly
God, from afar, benignantly regardeth.
For, willing, no one wears a yoke that 's servile:
And she, of many valuables, outpicked

The flower, the army's gift, myself has followed.
So,—since to hear thee, I am brought about thus,—
I go into the palace—purples treading.

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

There is the sea—and what man shall exhaust it?—
Feeding much purple's worth-its-weight-in-silver
Dye, ever fresh and fresh, our garments' tincture;
At home, such wealth, king, we begin—by gods' help—
With having, and to lack, the household knows not.
Of many garments had I vowed a treading
(In oracles if fore-enjoined the household)
Of this dear soul the safe-return-price scheming!
For, root existing, foliage goes up houses,
O'erspreading shadow against Seirios dog-star;
And, thou returning to the hearth domestic,
Warmth, yea, in winter dost thou show returning.
And when, too, Zeus works, from the green-grape acrid,
Wine—then, already, cool in houses cometh—
The perfect man his home perambulating!
Zeus, Zeus Perfecter, these my prayers perfect thou!
Thy care be—yea—of things thou mayst make perfect!

CHOROS.

Wherefore to me, this fear—

Groundedly stationed here
Fronting my heart, the portent-watcher—flits she?
Wherefore should prophet-play
The uncalled and unpaid lay,
Nor—having spat forth fear, like bad dreams—sits she
On the mind's throne beloved—well-suasive Boldness?
For time, since, by a throw of all the hands,
The boat's stern-cables touched the sands,
Has past from youth to oldness,—
When under Ilion rushed the ship-borne bands.

And from my eyes I learn—
Being myself my witness—their return.
Yet, all the same, without a lyre, my soul,
Itself its teacher too, chants from within
Erinus' dirge, not having now the whole
Of Hope's dear boldness: nor my inwards sin—
The heart that 's rolled in whirls against the mind
Justly presageful of a fate behind.
But I pray—things false, from my hope, may fall
Into the fate that 's not-fulfilled-at-all!

Especially at least, of health that 's great
The term 's insatiable: for, its weight
—A neighbour, with a common wall between—
Ever will sickness lean;

And destiny, her course pursuing straight,
Has struck man's ship against a reef unseen.
Now, when a portion, rather than the treasure,
Fear casts from sling, with peril in right measure,
It has not sunk—the universal freight,
(With misery freighted over-full)
Nor has fear whelmed the hull.
Then too the gift of Zeus,
Two-handedly profuse,
Even from the furrows' yield for yearly use
Has done away with famine, the disease;
But blood of man to earth once falling—deadly, black—
In times ere these,—
Who may, by singing spells, call back?
Zeus had not else stopped one who rightly knew
The way to bring the dead again.
But, did not an appointed Fate constrain
The Fate from gods, to bear no more than due,
My heart, outstripping what tongue utters,
Would have all out: which now, in darkness, mutters
Moodily grieved, nor ever hopes to find
How she a word in season may unwind
From out the enkindling mind.

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Take thyself in, thou too—I say, Kassandra!

Since Zeus—not angrily—in household placed thee
Partaker of hand-sprinklings, with the many
Slaves stationed, his the Owner's altar close to.
Descend from out this car, nor be high-minded!
And truly they do say Alkmené's child once
Bore being sold, slaves' barley-bread his living.
If, then, necessity of this lot o'erbalance,
Much is the favour of old-wealthy masters:
For those who, never hoping, made fine harvest
Are harsh to slaves in all things, beyond measure.
Thou hast—with us—such usage as law warrants.

CHOROS.

To thee it was, she paused plain speech from speaking.
Being inside the fatal nets—obeying,
Thou mayst obey: but thou mayst disobey too!

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Why, if she is not, in the swallow's fashion,
Possessed of voice that 's unknown and barbaric,
I, with speech—speaking in mind's scope—persuade her

CHOROS.

Follow! The best—as things now stand—she speaks of.
Obey thou, leaving this thy car-enthronement!

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Well, with this thing at door, for me no leisure
To waste time: as concerns the hearth mid-navelled,
Already stand the sheep for fireside slaying
By those who never hoped to have such favour.
If thou, then, aught of this wilt do, delay not!
But if thou, being witless, tak'st no word in,
Speak thou, instead of voice, with hand as Kars do!

CHOROS.

She seems a plain interpreter in need of,
The stranger! and her way—a beast's new-captured!

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Why, she is mad, sure,—hears her own bad senses,—
Who, while she comes, leaving a town new-captured,
Yet knows not how to bear the bit o' the bridle
Before she has out-frothed her bloody fierceness.
Not I—throwing away more words—will shamed be!

CHOROS.

But I,—for I compassionate,—will chafe not.
Come, O unhappy one, this car vacating,
Yielding to this necessity, prove yoke's use!

KASSANDRA.

Otototoi, Gods, Earth,—
Apollon, Apollon!

CHOROS.

Why didst thou "ototoi" concerning Loxias?
Since he is none such as to suit a mourner.

KASSANDRA.

Otototoi, Gods, Earth,—
Apollon, Apollon!

CHOROS.

Ill-boding here again the god invokes she
—Nowise empowered in woes to stand by helpful.

KASSANDRA.

Apollon, Apollon,
Guard of the ways, my destroyer!
For thou hast quite, this second time, destroyed me.

CHOROS.

To prophesy she seems of her own evils:
Remains the god-gift to the slave-soul present.

KASSANDRA.

Apollon, Apollon,
Guard of the ways, my destroyer!
Ha, whither hast thou led me? to what roof now?

CHOROS.

To the Atreidai's roof: if this thou know'st not,
I tell it thee, nor this wilt thou call falsehood.

KASSANDRA.

How! How!
God-hated, then! Of many a crime it knew—
Self-slaying evils, halters too:
Man's-shambles, blood-besprinkler of the ground!

CHOROS.

She seems to be good-nosed, the stranger: dog-like,
She snuffs indeed the victims she will find there.

KASSANDRA.

How! How!
By the witnesses here I am certain now!
These children bewailing their slaughters—flesh
dressed in the fire
And devoured by their sire!

CHOROS.

Ay, we have heard of thy soothsaying glory,
Doubtless: but prophets none are we in scent of!

KASSANDRA.

Ah, gods, what ever does she meditate?
What this new anguish great?
Great in the house here she meditates ill
Such as friends cannot bear, cannot cure it: and still
Off stands all Resistance
Afar in the distance!

CHOROS.

Of these I witless am—these prophesyings.
But those I knew: for the whole city bruits them.

KASSANDRA.

Ah, unhappy one, this thou consummatest?
Thy husband, thy bed's common guest,
In the bath having brightened. . . How shall I declare
Consummation? It soon will be there:
For hand after hand she outstretches,
At life as she reaches!

CHOROS.

Nor yet I've gone with thee! for—after riddles—
Now, in blind oracles, I feel resourceless.

KASSANDRA.

Eh, eh, papai, papai,
What this, I espy?
Some net of Haides undoubtedly
Nay, rather, the snare
Is she who has share
In his bed, who takes part in the murder there!
But may a revolt—
Unceasing assault—
On the Race, raise a shout
Sacrificial, about
A victim—by stoning—
For murder atoning!

CHOROS.

What this Erinus which i' the house thou callest
To raise her cry? Not me thy word enlightens!
To my heart has run
A drop of the crocus-dye:
Which makes for those
On earth by the spear that lie,

A common close
With life's descending sun.
Swift is the curse begun!

KASSANDRA.

How! How!
See—see quick!
Keep the bull from the cow!
In the vesture she catching him, strikes him now
With the black-horned trick,
And he falls in the watery vase!
Of the craft-killing cauldron I tell thee the case!

CHOROS.

I would not boast to be a topping critic
Of oracles: but to some sort of evil
I liken these. From oracles, what good speech
To mortals, beside, is sent?
It comes of their evils: these arts word-abounding
that sing the event
Bring the fear 't is their office to teach.

KASSANDRA.

Ah me, ah me—
Of me unhappy, evil-destined fortunes!
For I bewail my proper woe

As, mine with his, all into one I throw.
Why hast thou hither me unhappy brought?
—Unless that I should die with him—for nought!
What else was sought?

CHOROS.

Thou art some mind-mazed creature, god-possessed:
And all about thyself dost wail
A lay—no lay!
Like some brown nightingale
Insatiable of noise, who—well-away!—
From her unhappy breast
Keeps moaning Itus, Itus, and his life
With evils, flourishing on each side, rife.

KASSANDRA.

Ah me, ah me,
The fate o' the nightingale, the clear resounder!
For a body wing-borne have the gods cast round her,
And sweet existence, from misfortunes free:
But for myself remains a sundering
With spear, the two-edged thing!

CHOROS.

Whence hast thou this on-rushing god-involving pain

And spasms in vain?
For, things that terrify,
With changing unintelligible cry
Thou strikest up in tune, yet all the while
After that Orthian style!
Whence hast thou limits to the oracular road,
That evils bode?

KASSANDRA.

Ah me, the nuptials, the nuptials of Paris, the deadly
to friends!
Ah me, of Skamandros the draught
Paternal! There once, to these ends,
On thy banks was I brought,
The unhappy! And now, by Kokutos and Acheron's
shore
I shall soon be, it seems, these my oracles singing once
more!

CHOROS.

Why this word, plain too much,
Hast thou uttered? A babe might learn of such!
I am struck with a bloody bite—here under—
At the fate woe-wreaking
Of thee shrill shrieking:
To me who hear—a wonder!

KASSANDRA.

Ah me, the toils—the toils of the city
The wholly destroyed: ah, pity,
Of the sacrificings my father made
In the ramparts' aid—
Much slaughter of grass-fed flocks—that afforded no cure
That the city should not, as it does now, the burthen endure!
But I, with the soul on fire,
Soon to the earth shall cast me and expire.

CHOROS.

To things, on the former consequent,
Again hast thou given vent:
And 't is some evil-meaning fiend doth move thee,
Heavily falling from above thee,
To melodize thy sorrows—else, in singing,
Calamitous, death-bringing!
And of all this the end
I am without resource to apprehend

KASSANDRA.

Well then, the oracle from veils no longer
Shall be outlooking, like a bride new-married:

But bright it seems, against the sun's uprisings
Breathing, to penetrate thee: so as, wave-like,
To wash against the rays a woe much greater
Than this. I will no longer teach by riddles.
And witness, running with me, that of evils
Done long ago, I nosing track the footstep!
For, this same roof here—never quits a Choros
One-voiced, not well-tuned since no "well" it utters:
And truly having drunk, to get more courage.
Man's blood—the Komos keeps within the household
—Hard to be sent outside—of sister Furies:
They hymn their hymn—within the house close sitting—
The first beginning curse: in turn spit forth at
The Brother's bed, to him who spurned it hostile.
Have I missed aught, or hit I like a bowman?
False prophet am I,—knock at doors, a babbler?
Henceforward witness, swearing now, I know not
By other's word the old sins of this household!

CHOROS.

And how should oath, bond honourably binding,
Become thy cure? No less I wonder at thee
—That thou, beyond sea reared, a strange-tongued city
Shouldst hit in speaking, just as if thou stood'st by!

KASSANDRA.

Prophet Apollon put me in this office.

CHOROS.

What, even though a god, with longing smitten?

KASSANDRA.

At first, indeed, shame was to me to say this.

CHOROS.

For, more relaxed grows everyone who fares well.

KASSANDRA.

But he was athlete to me—huge grace breathing!

CHOROS.

Well, to the work of children, went ye law's way?

KASSANDRA.

Having consented, I played false to Loxias.

CHOROS.

Already when the wits inspired possessed of?

KASSANDRA.

Already townsmen all their woes I foretold.

CHOROS.

How wast thou then unhurt by Loxias' anger?

KASSANDRA.

I no one aught persuaded, when I sinned thus.

CHOROS.

To us, at least, now sooth to say thou seemest.

KASSANDRA.

Halloo, halloo, ah, evils!
Again, straightforward foresight's fearful labour
Whirls me, distracting with prelusive last-lays!
Behold ye those there, in the household seated,—
Young ones,—of dreams approaching to the figures?
Children, as if they died by their beloveds—
Hands they have filled with flesh, the meal domestic—
Entrails and vitals both, most piteous burthen,
Plain they are holding!—which their father tasted!
For this, I say, plans punishment a certain
Lion ignoble, on the bed that wallows,

House-guard (ah, me!) to the returning master
—Mine, since to bear the slavish yoke behoves me!
The ship's commander, Ilion's desolator,
Knows not what things the tongue of the lewd she-dog
Speaking, outspreading, shiny-souled, in fashion
Of Até hid, will reach to, by ill fortune!
Such things she dares—the female, the male's slayer!
She is . . . how calling her the hateful bite-beast
May I hit the mark? Some amphisbaina,—Skulla
Housing in rocks, of mariners the mischief,
Revelling Haides' mother,—curse, no truce with,
Breathing at friends! How piously she shouted,
The all-courageous, as at turn of battle!
She seems to joy at the back-bringing safety!
Of this, too, if I nought persuade, all's one! Why?
What is to be will come. And soon thou, present,
"True prophet all too much" wilt pitying style me.

CHOROS.

Thuestes' feast, indeed, on flesh of children,
I went with, and I shuddered. Fear too holds me
Listing what's true as life, nowise out-imaged.

KASSANDRA.

I say, thou Agamemnon's fate shalt look on.

CHOROS.

Speak good words, O unhappy! Set mouth sleeping!

KASSANDRA.

But Paian stands in no stead to the speech here.

CHOROS.

Nay, if the thing be near: but never be it!

KASSANDRA.

Thou, indeed, prayest: they to kill are busy.

CHOROS.

Of what man is it ministered, this sorrow?

KASSANDRA.

There again, wide thou look'st of my foretellings.

CHOROS.

For, the fulfiller's scheme I have not gone with.

KASSANDRA.

And yet too well I know the speech Hellen.

CHOROS.

For Puthian oracles, thy speech, and hard too.

KASSANDRA

Papai: what fire this! and it comes upon me!
Ototoi, Lukeion Apollon, ah me—me!
She, the two-footed lioness that sleeps with
The wolf, in absence of the generous lion,
Kills me the unhappy one: and as a poison
Brewing, to put my price too in the anger,
She vows, against her mate this weapon whetting
To pay him back the bringing me, with slaughter.
Why keep I then these things to make me laughed at,
Both wands and, round my neck, oracular fillets?
Thee, at least, ere my own fate will I ruin:
Go, to perdition falling! Boons exchange we—
Some other Até in my stead make wealthy!
See there—himself, Apollon stripping from me
The oracular garment! having looked upon me
—Even in these adornments, laughed by friends at,
As good as foes, i' the balance weighed: and vainly—
For, called crazed stroller,—as I had been gipsy,
Beggar, unhappy, starved to death,—I bore it.
And now the Prophet—prophet me undoing,
Has led away to these so deadly fortunes!

Instead of my sire's altar, waits the hack-block
She struck with first warm bloody sacrificing!
Yet nowise unavenged of gods will death be:
For there shall come another, our avenger,
The mother-slaying scion, father's doomsman:
Fugitive, wanderer, from this land an exile,
Back shall he come,—for friends, copestone these curses!
For there is sworn a great oath from the gods that
Him shall bring hither his fallen sire's prostration.
Why make I then, like an indweller, moaning?
Since at the first I foresaw Ilion's city
Suffering as it has suffered: and who took it,
Thus by the judgment of the gods are faring.
I go, will suffer, will submit to dying!
But, Haides' gates—these same I call, I speak to,
And pray that on an opportune blow chancing,
Without a struggle,—blood the calm death bringing
In easy outflow,—I this eye may close up!

CHOROS.

O much unhappy, but, again, much learned
Woman, long hast thou outstretched! But if truly
Thou knowest thine own fate, how comes that, like to
A god-led steer, to altar bold thou treadest?

KASSANDRA.

There 's no avodiance,—strangers, no some time more!

CHOROS.

He last is, anyhow, by time advantaged.

KASSANDRA.

It comes, the day : I shall by flight gain little.

CHOROS.

But know thou patient art from thy brave spirit!

KASSANDRA.

Such things hears no one of the happy-fortuned.

CHOROS.

But gloriously to die—for man is grace, sure.

KASSANDRA.

Ah, sire, for thee and for thy noble children!

CHOROS.

But what thing is it? What fear turns thee backwards?

KASSANDRA.

Alas, alas !

CHOROS.

Why this "Alas!" if 't is no spirit's loathing?

KASSANDRA.

Slaughter blood-dripping does the household smell of!

CHOROS.

How else? This scent is of hearth-sacrifices.

KASSANDRA.

Such kind of steam as from a tomb is proper!

CHOROS.

No Surian honour to the House thou speak'st of!

KASSANDRA.

But I will go,—even in the household wailing
My fate and Agamemnon's. Life suffice me!
Ah, strangers!
I cry not "ah"—as bird at bush—through terror
Idly! to me, the dead this much bear witness:

When, for me—woman, there shall die a woman,
And, for a man ill-wived, a man shall perish!
This hospitality I ask as dying.

CHOROS.

O sufferer, thee—thy foretold fate I pity.

KASSANDRA.

Yet once for all, to speak a speech, I fain am:
No dirge, mine for myself! The sun I pray to,
Fronting his last light!—to my own avengers—
That from my hateful slayers they exact too
Pay for the dead slave—easy-managed hand's work!

CHOROS.

Alas for mortal matters! Happy-fortuned,—
Why, any shade would turn them: if unhappy,
By throws the wetting sponge has spoiled the picture!
And more by much in mortals this I pity.
The being well-to-do—
Insatiate a desire of this
Born with all mortals is,
Nor any is there who
Well-being forces off, aroints
From roofs whereat a finger points,

"No more come in!" exclaiming. This man, too,
To take the city of Priamos did the celestials give,
And, honoured by the god, he homeward comes;
But now if, of the former, he shall pay
The blood back, and, for those who ceased to live,
Dying, for deaths in turn new punishment he dooms—
Who, being mortal, would not pray
With an unmischievous
Daimon to have been born—who would not, hearing thus?

AGAMEMNON.

Ah me! I am struck—a right-aimed stroke within me!

CHOROS.

Silence! Who is it shouts "stroke"—"right-aimedly" a wounded one?

AGAMEMNON.

Ah me! indeed again,—a second, struck by!

CHOROS.

This work seems to me completed by this "Ah me" of the king's;
But we somehow may together share in solid counsellings.

CHOROS 1.

I, in the first place, my opinion tell you:
—To cite the townsmen, by help-cry, to house here.

CHOROS 2.

To me, it seems we ought to fall upon them
At quickest—prove the fact by sword fresh-flowing!

CHOROS 3.

And I, of such opinion the partaker,
Vote—to do something: not to wait—the main point!

CHOROS 4.

'T is plain to see: for they prelude as though of
A tyranny the signs they gave the city.

CHOROS 5.

For we waste time; while they,—this waiting's glory
Treading to ground,—allow the hand no slumber.

CHOROS 6.

I know not—chancing on some plan—to tell it:
'T is for the doer to plan of the deed also.

CHOROS 7.

And I am such another: since I 'm schemeless
How to raise up again by words—a dead man!

CHOROS 8.

What, and, protracting life, shall we give way thus
To the disgracers of our home, these rulers?

CHOROS 9.

Why, 't is unbearable: but to die is better:
For death than tyranny is the riper finish!

CHOROS 10.

What, by the testifying "Ah me" of him,
Shall we prognosticate the man as perished?

CHOROS 11.

We must quite know ere speak these things concerning:
For to conjecture and "quite know" are two things.

CHOROS 12.

This same to praise I from all sides abound in—
Clearly to know—Atreides, what he 's doing!

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Much having been before to purpose spoken,
The opposite to say I shall not shamed be:
For how should one, to enemies,—in semblance,
Friends,—enmity proposing,—sorrow's net-frame
Enclose, a height superior to outleaping?
To me, indeed, this struggle of old—not mindless
Of an old victory—came: with time, I grant you!
I stand where I have struck, things once accomplished;
And so have done,—and this deny I shall not,—
As that his fate was nor to fly nor ward off.
A wrap-round with no outlet, as for fishes,
I fence about him—the rich woe of the garment:
I strike him twice, and in a double "Ah-me!"
He let his limbs go—*there!* And to him, fallen,
The third blow add I, giving—of Below-ground
Zeus, guardian of the dead—the votive favour.
Thus in the mind of him he rages, falling,
And blowing forth a brisk blood-spatter, strikes me
With the dark drop of slaughterous dew—rejoicing
No less than, at the god-given dewy-comfort,
The sown-stuff in its birth-throes from the calyx.
Since so these things are,—Argives, my revered here,—
Ye may rejoice—if ye rejoice: but I—boast!
If it were fit on corpse to pour libation,

That would be right—right over and above, too!
The cup of evils in the house he, having
Filled with such curses, himself coming drinks of.

CHOROS.

We wonder at thy tongue: since bold-mouthed truly
Is she who in such speech boasts o'er her husband!

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Ye test me as I were a witless woman:
But I—with heart intrepid—to you knowers
Say (and thou—if thou wilt or praise or blame me,
Comes to the same)—this man is Agamemnon,
My husband, dead, the work of the right hand here,
Ay, of a just artificer: so things are.

CHOROS.

What evil, O woman, food or drink, earth-bred
Or sent from the flowing sea,
Of such having fed
Didst thou set on thee
This sacrifice
And popular cries
Of a curse on thy head?
Off thou hast thrown him, off hast cut

The man from the city: but—
Off from the city thyself shalt be
Cut—to the citizens
A hate immense!

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Now, indeed, thou adjudgest exile to me,
And citizens' hate, and to have popular curses:
Nothing of this against the man here bringing,
Who, no more awe-checked than as 't were a beast's fate,—
With sheep abundant in the well-fleeced graze-flocks,—
Sacrificed *his* child,—dearest fruit of travail
To me,—as song-spell against Threkian blowings.
Not *him* did it behove thee hence to banish
—Pollution's penalty? But hearing *my* deeds
Justicer rough thou art! Now, this I tell thee:
To threaten thus—me, one prepared to have thee
(On like conditions, thy hand conquering) o'er me
Rule: but if God the opposite ordain us,
Thou shalt learn—late taught, certes—to be modest.

CHOROS.

Greatly-intending thou art:
Much-mindful, too, hast thou cried

(Since thy mind, with its slaughter-outpouring part,
Is frantic) that over the eyes, a patch
Of blood—with blood to match—
Is plain for a pride!
Yet still, bereft of friends, thy fate
Is—blow with blow to expiate!

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

And this thou hearest—of my oaths, just warrant!
By who fulfilled things for my daughter, Justice,
Ate, Erinus,—by whose help I slew him,—
Not mine the fancy—Fear will tread my palace
So long as on my hearth there burns a fire,
Aigisthos as before well-caring for me;
Since he to me is shield, no small, of boldness.
Here does he lie—outrager of this female,
Dainty of all the Chruseids under Ilion;
And she—the captive, the soothsayer also
And couchmate of this man, oracle-speaker,
Faithful bed-fellow,—ay, the sailors' benches
They wore in common, nor unpunished did so,
Since he is—thus! While, as for her,—swan-fashion,
Her latest having chanted,—dying wailing
She lies,—to him, a sweetheart: me she brought to—
My bed's by-nicety—the whet of dalliance.

CHOROS.

Alas, that some
Fate would come
Upon us in quickness—
Neither much sickness
Neither bed-keeping—
And bear unended sleeping,
Now that subdued
Is our keeper, the kindest of mood!
Having borne, for a woman's sake, much strife—
By a woman he withered from life!
Ah me!
Law-breaking Helena who, one,
Hast many, so many souls undone
'Neath Troia! and now the consummated
Much-memorable curse
Hast thou made flower-forth, red
With the blood no rains disperse,
That which was then in the House—
Strife all-subduing, the woe of a spouse.

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Nowise, of death the fate—
Burdened by these things—supplicate!
Nor on Helena turn thy wrath

As the man-destroyer, as "she who hath,
Being but one,
Many and many a soul undone
Of the men, the Danaoi"—
And wrought immense annoy!

CHOROS.

Daimon, who fallest
Upon this household and the double-raced
Tantalidai, a rule, minded like theirs displaced,
Thou rulest me with, now,
Whose heart thou gallest!
And on the body, like a hateful crow,
Stationed, all out of tune, his chant to chant
Doth Something vaunt!

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Now, of a truth, hast thou set upright
Thy mouth's opinion,—
Naming the Sprite,
The triply gross,
O'er the race that has dominion:
For through him it is that Eros
The carnage-licker
In the belly is bred: ere ended quite
Is the elder throe—new ichor!

CHOROS.

Certainly, great of might
And heavy of wrath, the Sprite
Thou tellest of, in the palace
(Woe, woe!)
—An evil tale of a fate
By Até's malice
Rendered insatiate!
Oh, oh,—
King, king, how shall I beweep thee?
From friendly soul whatever say?
Thou liest where webs of the spider o'ersweep
thee
In impious death, life breathing away.
O me—me!
This couch, not free.
By a slavish death subdued thou art,
From the hand, by the two-edged dart.

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Thou boastest this deed to be mine:
But leave off styling me
"The Agamemnonian wife!"
For, showing himself in sign
Of the spouse of the corpse thou dost see,

Did the ancient bitter avenging-ghost
Of Atreus, savage host,
Pay the man here as price—
A full-grown for the young one's sacrifice.

CHOROS.

That no cause, indeed, of this killing art thou,
Who shall be witness-bearer?
How shall he bear it—how?
But the sire's avenging-ghost might be in the deed a sharer.
He is forced on and on
By the kin-born flowing of blood,
—Black Ares: to where, having gone,
He shall leave off, flowing done,
At the frozen-child's-flesh food.
King, king, how shall I beweep thee?
From friendly soul whatever say?
Thou liest where webs of the spider o'ersweep thee
In impious death, life breathing away.
O me—me!
This couch, not free!
By a slavish death subdued thou art,
From the hand, by the two-edged dart.

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

No death "unfit for the free"
Do I think this man's to be:
For did not himself a slavish curse
To his household decree?
But the scion of him, myself did nurse—
That much-bewailed Iphigeneia, he
Having done well by,—and as well, nor worse,
Been done to,—let him not in Haides loudly
Bear himself proudly!
Being by sword-destroying death amerced
For that sword's punishment himself inflicted first.

CHOROS.

I at a loss am left—
Of a feasible scheme of mind bereft—
Where I may turn: for the house is falling:
I fear the bloody crash of the rain
That ruins the roof as it bursts amain:
The warning-drop
Has come to a stop.
Destiny doth Justice whet
For other deed of hurt, on other whetstones yet.
Woe, earth, earth—would thou hadst taken *me*
Ere I saw the man I see,

On the pallet-bed
Of the silver-sided bath-vase, dead!
Who is it shall bury him, who
Sing his dirge? Can it be true
That *thou* wilt dare this same to do—
Having slain thy husband, thine own,
To make his funeral moan:
And for the soul of him, in place
Of his mighty deeds, a graceless grace
To wickedly institute? By whom
Shall the tale of praise o'er the tomb
At the god-like man be sent—
From the truth of his mind as he toils intent?

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

It belongs not to thee to declare
This object of care!
By us did he fall—down there!
Did he die—down there! and down, no less,
We will bury him there, and not beneath
The wails of the household over his death:
But Iphigeneia,—with kindliness,—
His daughter,—as the case requires,
Facing him full, at the rapid-flowing
Passage of Groans shall—both hands throwing
Around him—kiss that kindest of sires!

CHOROS.

This blame comes in the place of blame:
Hard battle it is to judge each claim.
"He is borne away who bears away:
And the killer has all to pay."
And this remains while Zeus is remaining,
"The doer shall suffer in time"—for, such his ordaining.
Who may cast out of the House its cursed brood?
The race is to Até glued!

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Thou hast gone into this oracle
With a true result. For me, then,—I will
—To the Daimon of the Pleisthenidai
Making an oath—with all these things comply
Hard as they are to bear. For the rest—
Going from out this House, a guest,
May he wear some other family
To nought, with the deaths of kin by kin!
And,—keeping a little part of my goods,—
Wholly am I contented in
Having expelled from the royal House
These frenzied moods
The mutually-murderous.

AIGISTHOS.

O light propitious of day justice-bringing!
I may say truly, now, that men's avengers,
The gods from high, of earth behold the sorrows—
Seeing, as I have, i' the spun robes of the Erinues,
This man here lying,—sight to me how pleasant!—
His father's hands' contrivances repaying.
For Atreus, this land's lord, of this man father,
Thuestes, my own father—to speak clearly—
His brother too,—being i' the rule contested,—
Drove forth to exile from both town and household:
And, coming back, to the hearth turned, a suppliant,
Wretched Thuestes found the fate assured him
—Not to die, bloodying his paternal threshold
Just there: but host-wise this man's impious father
Atreus, soul-keenly more than kindly,—seeming
To joyous hold a flesh-day,—to my father
Served up a meal, the flesh of his own children.
The feet indeed and the hands' top divisions
He hid, high up and isolated sitting:
But, their unshowing parts in ignorance taking,
He forthwith eats food—as thou seest—perdition
To the race: and then, 'ware of the deed ill-omened,
He shrieked O!—falls back, vomiting, from the carnage,
And fate on the Pelopidai past bearing

He prays down—putting in his curse together
The kicking down o' the feast—that so might perish
The race of Pleisthenes entire: and thence is
That it is given thee to see this man prostrate.
And I was rightly of this slaughter stitch-man:
Since me,—being third from ten,—with my poor father
He drives out—being then a babe in swathe-bands:
But, grown up, back again has justice brought me:
And of this man I got hold—being without-doors—
Fitting together the whole scheme of ill-will.
So, sweet, in fine, even to die were to me,
Seeing, as I have, this man i' the toils of justice!

CHOROS.

Aigisthos, arrogance in ills I love not.
Dost thou say—willing, thou didst kill the man here,
And, alone, plot this lamentable slaughter?
I say—thy head in justice will escape not
The people's throwing—know that!—stones and curses!

AIGISTHOS.

Thou such things soundest—seated at the lower
Oarage to those who rule at the ship's mid-bench?
Thou shalt know, being old, how heavy is teaching
To one of the like age—bidden be modest!

But chains and old age and the pangs of fasting
Stand out before all else in teaching,—prophets
At souls'-cure! Dost not, seeing aught, see this too?
Against goads kick not, lest tript-up thou suffer!

CHOROS.

Woman, thou,—of him coming new from battle
Houseguard—thy husband's bed the while disgracing,—
For the Army-leader didst thou plan this fate too?

AIGISTHOS.

These words too are of groans the prime-begetters!
Truly a tongue opposed to Orpheus hast thou:
For he led all things by his voice's grace-charm,
But thou, upstirring them by these wild yelpings,
Wilt lead them! Forced, thou wilt appear the tamer!

CHOROS.

So—thou shalt be my king then of the Argeians—
Who, not when for this man his fate thou plannedst,
Daredst to do this deed—thyself the slayer!

AIGISTHOS.

For, to deceive him was the wife's part, certes:

I was looked after—foe, ay, old-begotten!
But out of this man's wealth will I endeavour
To rule the citizens: and the no-man-minder
—Him will I heavily yoke—by no means trace-horse,
A corned-up colt! but that bad friend in darkness,
Famine its housemate, shall behold him gentle.

CHOROS.

Why then, this man here, from a coward spirit,
Didst not thou slay thyself? But,—helped,—a woman,
The country's pest, and that of gods o' the country,
Killed him! Orestes, where may he see light now?
That coming hither back, with gracious fortune,
Of both these he may be the all-conquering slayer?

AIGISTHOS.

But since this to do thou thinkest—and not talk—thou soon shalt know!
Up then, comrades dear! the proper thing to do--not distant this!

CHOROS

Up then! hilt in hold, his sword let everyone aright dispose!

AIGISTHOS.

Ay, but I myself too, hilt in hold, do not refuse to die.

CHOROS.

Thou wilt die, thou say'st, to who accept it. We the chance demand.

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Nowise, O belovedest of men, may we do other ills!
To have reaped away these, even, is a harvest much to me.
Go, both thou and these the old men, to the homes appointed each,
Ere ye suffer! It behoved one do these things just as we did:
And if of these troubles there should be enough—we may assent
—By the Daimon's heavy heel unfortunately stricken ones!
So a woman's counsel hath it—if one judge it learning-worth.

AIGISTHOS.

But to think that these at me the idle tongue should thus o'erbloom,

And throw out such words—the Daimon's power experimenting on—
And, of modest knowledge missing,—me, the ruler, . . .

CHOROS.

Ne'er may this befall Argeians—wicked man to fawn before!

AIGISTHOS.

Anyhow, in after days, will I, yes, I, be at thee yet!

CHOROS.

Not if hither should the Daimon make Orestes straightway come!

AIGISTHOS.

O, I know, myself, that fugitives on hopes are pasture-fed!

CHOROS.

Do thy deed, get fat, defiling justice, since the power is thine!

AIGISTHOS.

Know that thou shalt give me satisfaction for this folly's sake!

CHOROS.

Boast on, bearing thee audacious, like a cock his females by!

KLUTAIMNESTRA.

Have not thou respect for these same idle yelpings! I and thou
Will arrange it, o'er this household ruling excellently well.

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